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AMERICAN SERIES.

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THE TWIN HUSSARS

By

FRANK WEST ROLLINS.

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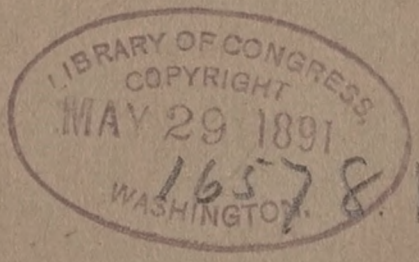
FRANK WEST ROLLINS.



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The Twin Hussars.

THE TWIN HUSSARS.

CHAPTER I.

It was the first day of the college year. The soft September sunshine came filtering down through the great elms in the yard, flecking with golden lights the dark-green sward; the deep, thick masses of ivy through which the windows of the buildings peeped were just beginning to yellow and fade, and the birds which filled the trees were making the most of the fleeting summer, and bursting their very throats with melody. Scattered among the trees, standing and lying upon the grass, were groups of eager boys, while here and there an anxious father was giving his parting advice to some ambitious freshman.

The old halls, with their ivy-covered walls, and their memories and echoes of thousands of departed occupants, threw open their welcoming doors to the new and old friends. The corridors were resonant with rushing feet, shouts of laughter poured from half-open doors, while hearty greetings and smiling faces met one at every turn. Fresh-looking, awkward boys were wandering

about the yard and buildings, examining their new quarters, and showing in their faces mingled delight and embarrassment; while careless, insouciant-looking fellows, with their tennis-caps on the backs of their heads and brier pipes in their mouths, and a general air of ownership, were sitting in the open windows.

Perhaps there is no day in the year so filled with happiness to the under-graduate, no day which he looks back upon with so much yearning and longing as this first day of the new year.

All the petty trials and annoyances, the small feuds and jealousies of the previous year are forgotten, and every familiar face is welcomed with joyous and boyish acclamations, and it's:

"Halloo, Bill! Why, Harry, how are you? Sam, old boy, give us your hand! Bert, I'm confounded glad to see you! Boys, here comes Richie!" etc., etc.

Every face is wreathed in smiles; every mind is dwelling on the good times in store for them during the coming year, and even the professors, as they pass, seem to have caught a little of the gladness of the sunshine and the infectious hilarity of the boys, and smile good-naturedly to the respectful salutations of the students.

If you are a college man, look back at those days; remember those hearty hand-shakes; listen to those dear old voices, many of them now hushed and gone; feel

once more the strong, happy pulsations of your heart as friend after friend appears on the scene. You'll never forget those days.

It is worth while to go through college, just for the happy recollections and the pleasant memories which cluster around a man's student life in after days. When I get tired or blue, I turn round from my desk, put my feet on the window-sill, go back a few chapters in my life, and read the preface and opening pages again, always with a new zest; always with a renewed appreciation for some old joke, which perhaps did not really amount to much, but which is very dear to me all the same; always with the same little twinge deep down that those days can never return; always with a sad reflection that when I meet Jack nowadays he is a very different sort of fellow from what he was in those days; always with a furtive passing of my hand over the top of my head, where the suggestive little bald spot lies, and then, with a "Heigh-ho!" I come back from the land of dreams, and dip my pen into the ink of reality once more.

CHAPTER II.

BUT our story carries us to one room in particular in this great honeycomb of be-pictured, be-tennis-racketed, be-street-signed, and generally bedecked students' apartments. In one of the front rooms of old Holworthy, whose walls and floors are said to be filled with bottles containing the names and mysterious prophecies of hundreds of those who have left fragrant memories here, two young men were beaming at each other in a very benignant manner, having just gone through the prescribed hand-shake.

One was now sitting in the cosy window-seat, his blonde hair falling carelessly over the low, broad forehead, his deep-set gray eyes glowing with animation and friendship. This was Larry Reynolds, whose character and qualities concern us a bit. Of medium height, athletic in build, and a face as near a sunbeam as possible, with laughter always in his eyes, a song upon his lips, waltzing to his own glad music, accompanying himself with a crackling accolade of snapping fingers, Larry dances through his pleasures or his tasks. No day so dark *he* can not see the sun, "no cloud so black it has no silver lining."

But for the reverse side of the picture. He would

probably be called weak, not physically, but in point of character. He lacks some of those sterling virtues so much to be admired and desired. He shrinks from trouble, pain, worry, and the blues.

He would grace a wedding, but make a sorry spectacle at a funeral. He lacks perseverance, constancy, firmness, his critics would tell you. He is a steadfast believer in the saying, "Sip your honey while you may, you'll be a long time dead."

But what would you have? You can't expect all the good qualities and Christian graces in one poor human, especially as he is not allowed to have anything to do with his own designing or manufacture. He comes into the world loaded down with the good and bad qualities, the virtues and vices of a more or less long line of ancestors, and is blamed if their peculiarities crop out a little too prominently for the peace of mind of those with whom he is thrown in contact. Heredity accounts for everything. When a young man commits some mischievous and costly act, you say you don't see where he got such traits, his father and mother are exemplary people. But just dig into the family history, and you won't have to unearth a great deal of rubbish before you come upon some ancestor who was apparently the devil incarnate, and in whom this very trait was ingrained.

You can't expect the butterfly to have the domestic qualities of the humble bee; nor a tumble-bug to emulate the lark; yet all are admirable in their sphere, and certainly would be missed.

The tall, slender, rather student-like youth, leaning on the mantel-piece, is the humble bee of the twain. His name is Rossiter Valentine. Rather a poetical name, but the owner is very practical. His thoughtful brow and earnest eyes betoken a man of ideas. He is a student, a thinker, a class leader, a dabbler in metaphysics, an adept at mechanics, a wonder at mathematics, and, above all, a rattling good fellow. As we listen at the door, we catch fragments of the conversation.

"Ross, you look as though, for once, you had given books the go-by and had had a little fun. What have you been up to?"

"Nothing, to tell the truth. I camped a month in the Rangely country, had a week's cruise with Jim Fessenden in his yacht, and spent the rest of the vacation lounging around home."

"Well, aren't you sorry to go to work again? Come now, be honest!"

"I don't want to palm myself off as a superior being, Larry," said the tall young man, with a deprecating smile; "but, honestly, I am quite ready to get at it again. I never feel exactly easy in my mind when I am

having such a good time. You know I haven't anything to look forward to except what I can earn, and tempus is fugiting."

"Oh, bother, Ross! What more do you want? You'll be top of the heap, rolling in wealth. You can't help it, with talents like yours; while I shall be sweating —no, I'll be hanged if I'll sweat!—for a pittance."

Ross looked thoughtfully at his companion for several moments before answering. Perhaps the latter's remarks had started a train of thought more serious than their previous conversation. At last, breaking from his speculations, he said:

"But, Larry, you haven't told of your own summer yet, and yours are always full of incidents. Your letters were so few and far between that I didn't get much information from them. I know you went to the Adirondacks, and flirted disgracefully with a minister's daughter from Philadelphia, and that you played polo at Newport; but aside from that, I am in the dark."

"My diligent friend," said Larry, with a heavy sigh, "you have sized up my vacation very well. I had a jolly good time; flirted as you say; played polo; sung a bit; had one or two quiet games of hankey-pankey, etc., etc. In fact, had all the fun I could get. You know I never let any escape. But, I say, Ross, I had a funny little adventure just before I came back—"

"Ah! now we are getting at it," and the young man by the mantel-piece braced himself as though ready for anything. "I knew there would be something interesting to tell, and this, I suppose, is the *pièce de résistance.* Well, go on, only don't expect me to believe more than half of it."

As he spoke he pulled a chair toward him and stretched his long body in it as comfortably as possible. His hands were folded in his lap, and his face wore a look of mock respect and attention. Larry looked at him for a moment, and then laughed. He evidently considered his chum's last remark rather a compliment to his abilities as a romancer. Then he began.

CHAPTER III.

"You've been down to our place, and you know the lay of the land pretty well there, and that will assist me in what I have to tell you. You will remember that we have a big orchard and garden at the rear of the house, and that next to us, within a stone's-throw, is a fine old place which has been unoccupied for a good many years. Owner died, you know, last spring, while I was here at Cambridge; the place was bought by an old chap from New York, who came down and settled there with his family. After college closed I went to the Adirondacks, and really didn't go home, except for a night, till just before vacation ended; so I didn't meet the new occupant or any of his tribe. Folks spoke casually of there being a new family there, but it didn't interest me.

"I felt as though I ought to put in a little time at home; so just about a fortnight ago I dropped down on the folks, and—"

"Oh, come, Larry! What's all this long preface for? Get down to business," interrupted the tall young man.

"Don't fret! I'm getting there. The morning after I arrived I went out and prospected round the place, felt

of the cows, looked at the hogs, patted the horses, and tried to show an interest in country affairs; but soon got tired of it, and went in to get a lively French novel I was reading. I won't tell you the name of it for fear you will read it and corrupt your morals. With this solace in hand I located myself on a long garden-seat out on the lawn behind the house, and was soon absorbed.

"I must have been reading some time, when I was startled by an apple falling on the seat by my side. There wasn't anything very wonderful about this, except for the fact that I was twenty feet from the nearest apple-tree. Considerably puzzled, I got up and looked around, expecting to see a member of the family peeping from behind some corner; but no one appeared, and I finally resumed my seat and book.

"I hadn't been reading five minutes when another one fell, seemingly from the skies, and this one hit me on the boot. I got up again, and walked round so that I could see behind the trees, but no one was in sight. I was a trifle annoyed, as I thought some one was making game of me; but I had made up my mind not to notice the matter. One or two more fell near, but I kept my eyes on my book. Suddenly two arrived at once, one hitting me in the stomach a good sharp rap and doubling me up like a jack-knife, and the other knocking off my hat.

"I was pretty mad by this, and jumped up to make a

thorough search for the miscreant. I was unsuccessful, though I looked behind every currant bush and shrub. No one there. I even went out into the road and looked behind the hedge; but no trace of anything. Finally I sat down, hot and disgusted, and picked up one of the apples and examined it curiously; it was a Gravestine. Now, I knew we had no Gravestine tree on our place, but right opposite me, in Mr. Mansfield's yard, there was one, for I had hooked the apples many a time as a kid. Here was a clue.

"You know there is no fence between our place and the next, and nothing to mark the line but the stunted remains of a hedge about a foot high. We boys prevented it ever growing any higher by everlastingly going over it and through it. This Gravestine tree which I speak of was just the other side of this diminutive hedge. I became wary, picked up my book, pulled my hat down over my eyes so that I could just watch the old Gravestine tree while apparently absorbed in my reading. The tree wasn't over four rods away, but its branches were large and wide-spreading, and the foliage thick. Around the trunk was a rustic seat.

"I had not been watching long—"

"Halloo, Larry," yelled a voice from the yard.

"Halloo, Dick!" answered Larry. "Glad to see you. Be round soon."

"No hurry about this thing, I see," said Ross, filling his pipe and stretching out his legs.

"Where was I? Oh, I know. I hadn't been watching long when I saw an apple shoot out from under the leaves and, after describing a graceful parabola, shoot down for me as straight as an arrow. It landed on my shoulder, but I never winced; I just watched the place where it came from, and in a minute— I say, Ross, haven't you got a cigar about you? I'm all out."

"Confound you—yes. Here," throwing him one; "now go on. You did that on purpose to get a wire edge on my curiosity."

Larry coolly took out his knife, cut the end off the cigar, lighed it, puffed out a great mouthful of blue smoke, and, after dodging "Cæsar's Commentaries," which his chum hurled at him, went on:

"I saw the leaves move gently aside, and the brightest, sweetest, most mischievous face appeared, surrounded by its frame of shimmering green, through which the sun was glancing and dancing. The eyes, sparkling with fun, were looking at me wickedly as though pondering on some further attacks. Here was a situation, and my mouth watered with the delightful anticipation of fun ahead. I had all I could do to curb myself and to keep from springing to my feet and shinning that tree for a nearer acquaintance with those laughing lips, but by a powerful effort of

self-restraint I sat still, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in my book, and utterly oblivious to all else.

"After watching me intently for a few moments I saw the eyes disappear and a white hand and arm dart out in their place, and an apple struck near me, a little wide of the mark this time. In order to keep up the deception I sprang up, and looked about again, but, of course, without success. Then, shaking my head in a puzzled way, I sauntered over to the tree in which my fair tormentor was posted. Stretching myself out on the seat which ran around the trunk, I opened my book and arranged my hat in such a manner that I could see what took place in the tree, out of the corner of my eye."

"I say, Larry," laughed Ross, "that was strategy, wasn't it? You ought to have gone to West Point instead of Harvard, and studied the art of war."

"Well, it was a pretty good tactical move, I will admit," replied Larry, with a satisfied smile, as he blew a big spiral of smoke toward the ceiling and flicked the ash from the end of his cigar. "But to continue. As the boys say, 'I had the dead-wood on her;' so I just took things comfortably, munched an apple, and looked unconcerned.

"All was quiet for awhile; no sound came from above. I was curious to see how she would get out of the scrape, and anxious as thunder to see the girl. Well, after a long wait, during which I planned all sorts of bright things to

say, I heard a gentle movement among the leaves, as though some one were climbing round. I peeped up, but the foliage was so thick that I could only catch a glimpse of something white. The rustling kept on for some minutes, and it seemed to me as if she was trying to work around to the opposite side of the tree. Of course, I had to head off this little scheme, and lazily arose, stretched myself, and when I sat down it was just under where the noise seemed to come from. After locating myself comfortably I began to whistle the 'Torpedo and the Whale,' just to comfort her, and as a kind of suggestion that I would 'bob up serenely' when any move of the above kind was made. When I had finished about fourteen verses I heard a petulant movement and smothered exclamation, at which I went at it again, and began on the fifteenth.

"I had now been under the tree about half an hour, and it was nearly noon. It must have been deucedly uncomfortable sitting astride a limb all that time, and I really began to feel rather sorry for the mischievous young woman. I meant to tire her out, but began to doubt my ability, and, besides, I had several times heard a voice from the next house calling, 'Patience! Patience!' so I made up my mind that the game I had treed was Patience. It seemed then to be a very appropriate name, but I learned later to my cost that it was a misnomer.

"As there seemed no present prospect of capitulation,

I lighted a cigarette just to pass the time, and keep her aware of my presence, and let her know that I was good for a siege. This brought matters to a focus, and there was a good deal of moving about. Then, suddenly, I heard a clear, sharp whistle, increasing in volume as the whistler became more bold. The notes were sweet and clear as a bell, but I was a trifle disturbed when I noticed that she seemed to be trying to call some one's attention, and was not whistling a tune. Who could she be after? Visions of irate fathers, of sharp-tongued mothers, and of big brothers flashed through my mind, and I glanced anxiously toward the house, expecting to see some one appear, but no one hove in sight. In fact the only living thing I could see was a solemn-looking jackass, of the Swiss cottage style of architecture, who was laboriously grubbing his dinner about ten rods away.

"All at once I noticed a connection between the whistling and the Jack, for he pricked up his wilted ears, and slowly meandered toward my location. As he neared me he cast his solemn glance curiously aloft. After a long and intent gaze he seemed to be satisfied with his examination, and deliberately placed himself right under the spot where my prisoner was concealed.

"He was about three feet distant from me, and he looked me in the eye with a solemnity and depth of meaning which the sphinx might have envied. I ran my

tongue out at him in derision, but I was met with such a look of silent contempt that I sunk back, and awaited developments."

"Probably took you for one of the species, and wanted to scrape acquaintance," said Ross. "Wonderfully intelligent animal."

"I was wild with curiosity to see what all this meant," continued Larry, disdaining to notice his chum's slur. The brute stood there without blinking, and kept his eyes fastened on me in a disconcerting manner.

"A great rustling among the leaves over my head attracted my attention, and looking up suddenly, to my utter astonishment there flashed before my eyes a whirlwind of white draperies, leaves and broken twigs. The next thing that I perceived was my prisoner seated calmly upon the Jack's back, a little heated and tumbled, it is true, but fully self-possessed, and master of the situation. The limb was rather low, you see, and she had let herself down and dropped right smack on the brute's back. It was neatly done, and I couldn't help clapping my hands in spite of myself."

"Had you on the hip, hadn't she?" laughed Ross. "What was she, as beautiful as you imagined, or did she prove a fraud and a deceit as most women generally do?"

"Oh, you hold on! I'll tell you all about it if you keep still. Of course I felt rather chagrined to be out-

witted in this way, but she clearly had the best of it, so I threw down my book and taking off my hat made a most elaborate bow. Upon which she sat up as straight as an arrow, gave me a crushing look, and rode off on her jackass with the air of a queen."

"Sat on! by Jove," chuckled the audience. "That's the best thing I've heard for a long time. I'd have given a fiver to have been a witness. Just think of it, the irresistible Larry Reynolds squelched, squashed, sat upon, set back, put in a hole! Three cheers for the girl, I say!"

"You be blowed! Wait till you hear the whole story, will you, and see whether I was squelched or not."

"Well, you're as long winded as a hen that's just laid an egg."

"I watched that confounded old Jack waddle off with my erstwhile prisoner—by the way, Ross, that's a good word, erstwhile; I picked it up of a stunning-looking girl from Boston who was at Bar Harbor, and I just kicked myself for not making better use of my opportunities. But how could I know that there was an infernal old donkey straying round that knew more than half the fellows in our class, and who had a private cipher code of signals for use between himself and that girl. And then, that look she gave me fairly paralyzed me—froze my blood. I've heard of the superb air of an eastern princess, but hers would knock any eastern princess silly.

"At last she disappeared round the corner of the house, and the moment they were out of sight I heard a most outrageous burst of laughter; of course I knew that it was that girl laughing at me and heaping derision on my head."

"But what was she like," queried Ross, impatiently. "Why can't you tell a fellow?"

"Thought you didn't care anything about the sex," replied Reynolds with provoking coolness, as he blew a ring of blue smoke through the open window.

"I don't ordinarily, but it strikes me this must have been a *rara avis.*"

"You bet she was; and a *mene tekel,* and an *olla podrida* too. I don't know how to describe her exactly. She was one of those girls who have to be seen to be appreciated. Of course I can tell you that she is *petite,* has dark hair and eyes, and an olive complexion, and is rather of the Spanish type of beauty. In repose her face is a trifle sad, but when she laughs, which is a good share of the time, her face fairly swims in light, and her eyes expand and grow upon you till they seem as large as those great pansies the florists sell now, and as deep and richly black, with that violet blackness of the pansy too. She has a wonderful effect upon you; at least, she did on me. She impresses herself upon you; you feel her presence as well as see it. If I were blindfolded I should know she

were by; for when she is near me I feel as though there were a powerful battery somewhere in her organization sending compelling and subduing currents through me."

"Quite a florid description, my boy. I congratulate you upon your proficiency in rhetorical expression."

"I've had some practice lately."

"Was that the end of it? Didn't you see her again? Did this crushing defeat completely flabbergast you?"

"See her again? Of course I did. What do you take me for? I became very much attached to the country all at once; interested in silos, fruit culture, etc. Found the place quite endurable. Something to look forward to, you see. The next day I loafed round the garden all day hoping to get a glimpse of her. No glimpse. Didn't show up. Made a few discreet inquiries of the folks about new neighbors. Found they didn't know much about them, except their name, which was Mansfield, and that the family consisted of an old man, wife, and daughter.

"I resolved a resolve—"

"Hope it was kept better than most of your resolutions," remarked Ross, thoughtfully.

"Shut up! I resolved to do a little detective business, and know my neighbors more thoroughly. It hardly seemed Christian not to know your next door neighbors. The brief period which I had spent in her vicinity had magnetized me, as it were, and I was very anxious to have

an opportunity to place myself on a different footing; and, besides, her not appearing the next day rather mortified my *amour propre.* I took up my station permanently in the garden, laid in a supply of Maupassant's novels and others of a similarly religious character, stocked my cigarette-case, and prepared for a siege. I knew the girl couldn't hold out long in such a dull place as that."

"No conceit about you."

"I know my worth," answered Larry, cheerfully. "Two days passed. No girl. The morning of the third day arrived, and I was getting confoundedly impatient. I had smoked so many cigarettes that my hands had the St. Vitus' dance. My eyes were aching from watching the house while apparently reading, and I had used up my vocabulary of profanity, besides borrowing several of Jack Nason's copyrighted cusses. By the way, did you ever hear any one swear so artistically, so linguistically, and so deftly as Jack. He is my admiration! Well, as I was saying, I was all played out when my erstwhile prisoner walked deliberately out of the house and down into the garden, where she wandered around among the flower-beds, picking a rose or two, but, mind you, not once looking in my direction."

CHAPTER IV.

"SHE had on a white lawn dress, or something of that kind, and swung her shade-hat by the ribbon in her hand. The dress was immensely becoming to her—so simple, so pure, and such a set-off to her dark beauty. I pretended not to notice her at all, while watching her with all my eyes from under my hat-brim. It seemed to take her a long time to find the flower she wanted, but at last she turned away from the garden path, and, to my astonishment, leaped lightly over the hedge into our garden as easily as any boy.

"I wondered what under the starry canopy she was going to do. I had become so used to surprises from this girl that I was on the *qui vive* for her next move. I didn't know but she would draw a pistol and practice on me. From her actions and demeanor it was evident that she was ignoring me, and was utterly oblivious of my presence, for she gathered her spotless skirts in one hand, to keep them from the still wet grass, while she held her hat and the roses in the other, and hummed an air from a popular opera.

"I followed her with my eyes across our garden until

she was so far in my rear that I could not see her without turning around, and that I was bound not to do. I was wild to know what she was up to, but kept my eyes on my book, straining my ears to catch the slightest sound. Not a movement could I hear; all behind was still; the humming had ceased, and I was about ready to jump up and kick something, I was so nervous, when a sweet voice right behind me said:

"'Couldn't you read easier if you held the book right side up?'

"Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather; but I gathered myself together, and, without turning round, I answered, stupidly enough:

"'I was born with my eyes upside down.'

"'What a remarkable thing! I see you can read without cutting the leaves, too.'

"This was a floorer, but I came up smiling, and pointing to the seat at my side with my most Chesterfieldian air, I said:

"'Perhaps, as you are so good at cutting capers, you will sit down and cut the leaves for me.'

"'Mamma always puts capers in salads,' she replied, with the most innocent and ingenuous air, as she took the offered seat.

"'Does she, now? And you put spice in your capers.'

"'Your name is Larry, I believe,' said she, suddenly turning on me with the most delightful smile, 'and mine is Patience. We are neighbors now, so I thought I wouldn't stand on ceremony;'" and she held out her hand to me in the most deliciously naïve manner you ever saw.

"'Delighted, I'm sure,' I replied, as I took her soft little number five in my seven and a half."

"Cheek by the yard!" remarked Ross.

"Yes; wasn't it?"

"Yours, I mean."

"Oh, mine? Well, perhaps so. At any rate, I held her hand as long as I could find any pretense for doing so, apparently forgetful that I was holding it; but when I did let go it was very suddenly. I was still hanging on and looking things unutterable, when with her unoccupied hand she quietly and unobservedly rammed a hat-pin into my leg, and when I yelled out with pain and dropped her hand as though it had been a nettle, she looked up in the most surprised way, and said:

"'What is it? I hope you're not ill?'

"'Oh, no! Just a momentary pain I'm subject to. I have these attacks once in awhile.'

"'I'm so sorry!'

"'I don't think I quite take you yet.'

"'Take me? Now, what do you mean by that?'

"'Well, I mean that I haven't known you long

enough to fathom the depths of your kittenish disposition. I don't "tumble to you," as it were.'

"'But I tumbled to you yesterday.'

"'Yes, and very gracefully, too.'

"'Do you think so? Lucky Galway was near by, or I might have had to stay there all night.'

"'I suppose Galway is the solemn-looking friend who came to your assistance?'

"'Yes, he is my friend, and does just as I tell him. What long ears you have!'

"'Do you think they are long enough to admit me as one of Galway's companions?'

"'Not quite. It takes something more than long ears, you see.'

"'Oh, thank you!'

"A long silence ensued, during which she gouged out a great hole in the path with her heel, covering my white flannel trousers with dirt in the operation. I was exasperated, amused, astonished, and puzzled. I couldn't make her out. I'll be hanged if I could tell whether she was really artless and innocent, or whether she was making a fool of me. I couldn't think of a single bright thing to say, and we just sat there like two Stoughton bottles. But during this intermisson I managed to take an inventory of her.

"I found that she did not suffer from a close exami-

nation. Her complexion simply perfect—peach-bloom and all that, you know. And those eyes! Well, they just made me jump every time she looked at me. I felt as though she could read every thought as it skimmed through my brain.

"I noticed her mouth, too; for, you know, old man, you are forever telling me I have a weak mouth, and so I am always examining people's mouths, to see if I am an exception. Now, she had what you would call a strong mouth, expressive of a firm character. None of your Cupid bows, with down-dropping corners, but lips as straight as a ferule; and when they were shut you felt as though that settled the whole matter. They were red, and full, and very kissable, however."

"How do you know?"

"Know? Tried 'em, of course. That comes in the next chapter."

"Say, do you know how long you've been talking?"

"Don't know! Don't care! Want me to stop?"

And he put his feet down, as though about to get up.

"Oh, no; I suppose I might as well hear it all now. Have to go through with it some time. You'll pester me with this ferule-mouthed girl till you meet another."

"You'd have a fit if I didn't finish it now," replied

Larry. "Don't you suppose I see through you? You're chock-full of curiosity, with all your appearance of indifference."

"Well, granted. But get down to business."

CHAPTER V.

"To begin where I left off: The silence was getting embarrassing, and I was just on the point of saying something sentimental, kind of feeling my way, as it were, when a rhinoceros struck his monstrous, nasty head between us, and the drum of my ear was almost ruptured by the most horrible blast—a kind of concatenation of all the devilish, discordant, harsh, jagged sounds distinguishable by the human ear. It sounded to me like some of those grand wind-ups in Wagner's operas — e-yaw—e-yaw — yaw-e-e—yaw-e-yaw!"

"A rhinoceros, Larry? How in the world could a rhinoceros have got in your garden?"

"Well, you see, it wasn't really a rhinoceros, but I thought it was when I first saw it. It was, in fact, that blamed old jackass, who had come round to see what we were up to. I nearly fainted away at the first blast, I was so scared, and I jumped clean into the air about five feet, and came down sprawling in the dirt of the path. If I could make as good a leap again I could get the prize for the running high jump.

"As soon as I could I gathered myself together and

looked up fearfully to see what had struck me, and there was that girl with her arm fondly round the neck of her infernal jackass, and his head most languidly reposing on her breast. It was too much. I was too thoroughly startled to get up, and sat there and stared at my tormentors, who looked as unconcerned as you please. I could swear that the donkey winked at me; and, do you know, Ross, I believe they were donkeys that the devil went into in that old Bible story, and not hogs."

Ross was chuckling to himself at his chum's discomfiture. But there was not a particle of false pride about Larry, and he always enjoyed a joke on himself as well as any one. In fact, he was the first to tell it.

"Well, did that bring things to a focus?" asked Ross.

"No, not that day. After a few moments I got up, with as dignified an air as I could assume under the circumstances, and walked out of the garden. I don't know what the girl did, for I didn't look round; but I could hear the inseparables purring and chuckling to each other. The worst of it was, though, that my sister saw the whole performance from her chamber-window, and for the next few days she made my life miserable for me by innuendoes, hints, and sly phrases. I expected every minute father would get on to it, but Sis didn't actually give the thing away, though she kept skimming along the edge.

"After my ignominious defeat I saw her nearly every

day, and we became the best of friends. Gradually a change took place in her manner toward me, and from the teasing, laughing tom-boy she became quite subdued, and even sober. At times she would break out in some wildness; but on the whole she was very well-behaved. She wouldn't allow the slightest approach to love-making or familiarity, and on the one or two occasions on which I attempted it I was met with a rebuke which tingled for hours. I had an awful good time with her, though."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Ross, dryly.

"That girl is a study, and I must confess I haven't made her out yet," went on Larry. "Finally, the time for me to leave came around, and one day, as we were sitting in the woods, under a big pine, I told her that the next morning I started for college. She gave me one look, and then was perfectly mute; would make no answer to all my persistent talk and questions. I thought that she was provoked with me, but could think of no reason. She simply stared straight before her, and said nothing.

"Finally I gave it up and relapsed into silence as well. I was just making up my mind to move toward the house, when, suddenly, without a moment's warning, she sprung at me with a great sob, and before I could recover from my surprise she kissed me full on the lips, and was off like the wind. I didn't see her again, but I can feel

that kiss now;" and the speaker stroked his young mustache lovingly.

Larry seemed really affected, so Ross forebore any criticisms, and looked thoughtfully at a cast of "Romeo and Juliet" which stood on the mantel.

CHAPTER VI.

On the marble tablet of one of those great office buildings on lower Broadway, among a long list of other occupants, is the name, "Rossiter Valentine, Attorney at Law, Room 20."

Suppose we look in at No. 20. The room has but one occupant—a tall, earnest-looking, bearded man, who is sitting at a desk, gazing at a letter which he holds in his hand. But his eyes are not reading; they are turned inward; he is in a brown study. (I don't know why it should be a brown study any more than a green, or blue, or red study, but that is the phrase, and it conveys the meaning.) Let's peep over his shoulder, and see if we can get a clue to his thoughts. Why, this is no letter; it is a wedding invitation, and reads as follows:

"Mr. and Mrs. John Mansfield request the pleasure of your company at the wedding of their daughter Patience to Mr. Larry Reynolds, at St. John's Church, Newburg, Wednesday, June 8th, at 5 o'clock."

So this is the absorbing topic on his active mind! Not a very terrifying nor profound one, surely. But, hark! he is thinking aloud. It is a common habit among men of sedentary proclivities.

"Six years! Six years ago since Larry and I sat in our room that bright September day, and he told me the story of his first meeting with this little girl whom he is now about to marry. It hardly seems more than six months; and to think of that blessed rascal's being faithful to her all that time! I wouldn't have believed it of him! Why, a week was usually the limit of his flames. He was as inconstant as any humming-bird darting from flower to flower, and just sipping the cream of the sweetest honey from each. There must be something peculiar about this little woman to have held him so long and so steadfastly by her side. I really have a great curiosity to see her.

"Six years ago! Ah! those were happy days. How the sun used to pour into our dear old room in Holworthy, filtering through the noble old elms in the yard; how the merry shouts of the boys used to come drifting through the open window; and how sweet life was, and—God forgive us!—how little we appreciated it!

"So Larry is caught at last! Well, I hope it may be for the best, but I must confess that I haven't any great confidence in his staying powers. Not that he would willfully or premeditatingly go wrong, but he's so prone to act upon the impulse of the moment. If I remember rightly his affianced isn't a woman to be trifled with, either. I should judge, from his description, that she has

a strong, passionate nature, quite Southern in its character, which would hardly brook anything like neglect or coolness.

"And I am to be 'best man,' and help the old boy put on his chains. Well, I hope he will wear them patiently, and that his wife will be able to put pads of love under the places where there is the most friction, so that the galling won't be intolerable. I shall have a chance to see the little woman and form my own opinion of her."

Six years have passed, our young attorney says. What have our two friends been about during this time? Of course, they took their degrees—Ross with honors, and Larry "by the skin of his teeth;" and then the former entered the Law School, and the latter the Medical; but they continued to room together and were as intimate as time would permit. Though the Medical School was in town, Larry so loved the college that he put up with the long rides on the cars in order to keep his old room and chum.

Larry did very well in medicine, and really took a great interest in surgery; while Ross, as usual, led his class in the Law School. Upon graduation the latter went to New York and by dint of hard work and ability had already acquired a fair practice, and was looked upon as one of the rising young lawyers of the city.

Larry managed to get into the Massachusetts General Hospital, as one of the house-officers, for a year; and then hung out his sign in one of the principal cities of New Hampshire. He had been practicing about a year, and though patients were few it didn't trouble Larry much; he smiled on those he did have, and cured them more by his good-humor and happy disposition than by any medicine he administered. If there is any virtue in mind-cure, he possessed that power. He could laugh a woman out of the megrims, joke a man's heart disease into the realms of impossibility, and tickle a sick child into convulsions of hearty laughter.

His presence in the sick-room was a sedative for overstrung nerves, a very gleam of intellectual sunlight through the darkness of mental depression. Perhaps, in the highest sense, he was not a great and skilled physician, but he was a successful one, and sent more on the road to health than to the grave-yard—and that is the main thing. Nothing worried him, nothing disturbed him, nothing frightened him; always cool and collected, he had faith in himself and his star, and had so much confidence in his future that, even on his small income and few patients, he resolved to carry out his long-cherished plan of getting married. Hence the invitation which we have read.

CHAPTER VII.

THE soft, soothing breeze of a June evening was faintly stirring the young leaves of the old Gravestine tree —leaves so young and tender that they seemed to entreat the breeze not to blow too hard, lest it injure them. The air which gently kissed the brow was fragrant with that sweet, earthy odor which denotes life, buds, blossoms, blooms, and beauty. It was the odor which makes the blood pulse and flow through the veins, and the heart to expand, and puts death and decay far away from our thoughts.

The young moon, also in the bud, hung, trembling, over the distant hills, as though fearful of trying to climb the dizzy heights of heaven, while shafts of light silvered the soft, downy clouds which were floating here and there aimlessly, seemingly playing a heavenly game of hide-and-seek. A hush pervaded the air, for it was too early for the crickets and other warm-weather insects which tune their merry harps in July and August. No sound broke the stillness unless one fancied he heard the sap climbing up the heart of the maples.

"How many years is it since that fateful morning

when I first saw you, not under, but *in* this tree, Patience?"

"Six years, Larry. It hardly seems possible, though. But they have been happy ones, with the exception of a few *mauvaises quart-d'heures*, which I owe to you, but which are all forgiven now."

And the dark eyes looked up tenderly and sweetly, and she laid her head back gently against the old tree, and a far-away look filled her eyes. Larry could not tell whether she was looking into the past or the future.

For some time no word was spoken; a dreamy silence such as lovers understand, and in which their thoughts follow and meet each other by some subtle process; a pressure of the hand, a glance of the eye keeping the connection and carrying the magnetic current from soul to soul. Larry's eyes were full of love and wondering admiration. At last he said:

"Patience, I have known you for six years. They have been sweet, happy years, filled with gladness and a new life, beginning with the day when I first saw your dear face among the leaves of this old tree. I have studied you. You are the only book that I have read, beside my medical books, during that time, and my medical studies were child's play compared to the depths and intricacies of your character. I have lain awake nights to analyze you; you have danced between the lines of my

surgical works; you have caused me to lose the value of many a lecture; but, do you know, you are as much a mystery to me to-day as you were when you first introduced me to your donkey? There have been times when I have done things which grieved you, dear, but, believe me, I have been true at heart. I am so different from you. I look at life so differently; things which seem trivial to me are so important to you that I fall far short of your ideal. My love is like one of those little meadow-brooks which wind and wind, and crook and turn, while yours is a great, broad, steady-sweeping river. Both, however, arrive at the sea just the same. Never forget that."

"When I am with you this way, Larry, I believe it," she replied, softly passing her hand over his as it lay on his knee; "but I have doubted, dear, and to me doubt is worse than death. You say you do not understand me, but I am not hard to understand. Is it so strange and uncommon for a woman to be honest, and frank, and dread deceit? Does my candor seem forwardness to you? Do you love me the less because I almost told you of my love before you confessed yours? Dear, love means eternity to me; love is my life, and when I gave my love to you I gave my life, my happiness, my existence, my soul into your hands. I think it is more to me than to most women; it is nearer my soul!"

"When you talk to me that way, little one, I feel

afraid. I tremble lest I fall short of your expectations; lest, unwittingly, I trip and mar your life. My nature differs so widely from yours. Yours is deep, strong, and unyielding, like those of the early martyrs, and I can fancy you undergoing any torture rather than sacrifice a principle or fail in a duty; while mine is weaker, more insouciant, more yielding, readier to sacrifice duty to ease. I fear that the thumbscrew of adversity would extort a momentary renunciation of faith from me, and that what might seem a crime to you would be to me a peccadillo. Yet, darling, in the years that are to come I will try to be true and live up to your ideal; I will try to be worthy of the pure, true love which I have won."

"I know you will, Larry," answered Patience, as she nestled up to him till her head lay close against his breast and the perfume of her hair intoxicated him with its delicate fragrance, "but I fear myself more than you. In one way you do *not* know me. As strong as my love is, there is another sentiment in me which is as strong, or stronger. I could not *share* your love; I must have it all, *all*, every particle, every minutest portion of it; I would not permit any other woman to have the smallest iota of it, and if I missed a grain—and I should know by intuition if any were missing—it would kill me, Larry. Remember that; remember it and treasure it in your heart as you value my love and our happiness."

"With God's help I will, dear. To-morrow, at this time, you will be my wife, and I will try and be so good and true that every day of our life may be as happy as this perfect one."

"God bless you, dear! and good-night;" and she drew his head down on her shoulder and kissed him—a long, long kiss, while her eyes closed in silent happiness.

Then she drew away, and went slowly toward the house, while Larry remained wrapped in dreamy silence, and the breeze sung itself to sleep. The moon had reached the zenith, and the flying clouds had chased each other below the horizon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH the oriel windows shafts of amber-colored light fell in narrow bands aslant the church, and little particles of silvery dust floated through it like some mystical and impalpable essence. Great masses of roses filled the font and covered the chancel-rail, while every pillar and post was wreathed with smilax and flowers. The organist was impatiently touching the keys as though awaiting the moment when he would sweep one great harmony of sound from the pipes. The ushers hurried up and down the aisles with fair women and expectant girls upon their arms; every eye was bright, every nerve on the alert. Each time that the church door opened rapid glances were cast over shoulders to see if the bridal party had arrived.

What an opportunity to study human nature is a wedding! If one could be hidden behind the chancel-rail, with a small camera, and take a series of photographs before and during the ceremony, and catch the varying and shifting expressions on the different faces: the eager anticipation and longing of sweet young eyes; the curious and envious glances of those whose opportunities are daily growing less and fading into the dim might-have-been;

the sad regret and longing in those who once participated in a like ceremony, and whose black veils indicate the aching void which can never be solaced till the great veil which hides the mysteries of the hereafter shall be raised. Such a series of photographs would give the key to nearly all the tragedies of human life.

But the door leading to the robing-room has opened, and the tall erect figure of the bishop appears, followed by two young men, whose faces indicate the gravity of the occasion. Slowly they follow their surpliced leader across the chancel, stopping outside the rail, while he enters and closes the gate.

Both are refined and cultivated looking; erect and fearless in their bearing; good representatives of the best American manhood, and there is no better. One is considerably taller than the other, and as the audience curiously watch them while waiting for the more important advent, they notice that the taller of the twain is standing a little apart from his companion and in such a position that he can look down at him. He seems to have forgotten his surroundings and the great church full of people, and his eyes are full of tender love, such as a mother has for a son or an elder brother for a younger, while his parted lips appear to move as though his thoughts were taking form unconsciously.

One grand burst of melody, and the wedding march

from "Lohengrin," so familiar and yet so grand, so beautiful, so dearly loved by all those who have music in their hearts, poured out upon the immense audience, pulsing and vibrating among the groined arches and fluted pillars; the broad doors swung open, and the anxiously awaited entered, led by an erect, beautifully formed girl in simple but perfectly fitting white.

Then the bride approached, scarcely touching her father's arm, walking as proudly and fearlessly as one of the *grande dames* of the old French nobility, her eyes fixed with glistening intensity upon one figure and face, every feature expressive of endless and passionate love. As they reached the chancel steps the bridegroom advanced to meet them, and his eyes met hers with a look which was eloquent with promise.

He took the hand fearlessly held out to him, and they advanced to the altar-rail. The bishop began the impressive service of the church.

When the first notes of the organ broke the waiting stillness, the taller of the two men standing in the chancel started as though suddenly recalled to himself, and glanced quickly down the aisle at the approaching cortège. His eyes rapidly sought out the central figure and followed her as she walked slowly toward the chancel. At first his glance betokened simple curiosity, but as he noticed the proud, noble carriage of the head, the fearless, open

brow, and the honest, outspoken love shining from her eyes, curiosity deepened into interest.

Unconsciously, as they neared the rail, he drew nearer, to get a better view. It struck him as something he had never seen before—a new kind of woman.

This tall lawyer, this closely applied student, his whole soul in his work, his strong mind fixed on future success, had had no time for woman's friendship, and his knowledge of women was very limited. His friends had all been men, and men wedded to books rather than to women. He was slow to form intimacies, but when once formed they were lasting. He was true as the needle to the pole.

His idea of women had been gathered principally from what he had heard his chum Larry say about them and his observations of Larry's friends. He had unconsciously absorbed the impression that they were light, inconstant, and a stumbling-block in the way of a man who wanted to succeed in life. Consequently, he had shunned their acquaintance, and had got along very well without them, he thought. But here was, apparently, a revelation; here was a woman whose nobility of soul shone from her eyes; here was a woman who needed no enthusiastic description; no words could speak more plainly nor more surely of her absolute and undying faithfulness, her high and noble nature, than her dark, expressive eyes, her broad, open brow.

In spite of his views in regard to women, in spite of the fact that he had purposely shunned them all his life, there was deep down in Ross's heart an indistinct and shadowy ideal, a woman whom he dreamt that some time, in the dim, vague future, he might meet. As he looked at this happy, tear-dimmed bride he felt that he had met his ideal; his shadow had become a reality, and was about to be married to his best friend.

CHAPTER IX.

How had Larry Reynolds, careless, reckless, inconstant, won this woman? The bringing together of two such people seemed strange to him, somehow. Her nature was evidently as strong and fearless as Larry's was weak; hers would be the controlling spirit.

And then Ross felt a spasmodic twinge of jealousy and anger sweep through him. Why was it that everything good, everything agreeable, enjoyable, sweet and gracious, seemed to fall into the lap of this happy-go-lucky fellow who never put forth an effort to deserve them, while he, who worked like a slave and denied himself every indulgence, was refused them? The next moment he was ashamed of the thought, and mentally begged pardon and forgiveness of his friend, whose many good qualities none knew so well as he. Who more kind, more loving, more generous, more forgiving than Larry? Whom loved he better, or who had more affection for him?

The ceremony was over, and Larry was a benedict, and merry toasts were passing from mouth to mouth at the wedding-breakfast. Larry had given his friend the seat of honor at the right of the bride, and in her sweet and

womanly way, she tried to draw this quiet student from his shell.

"Do you know, I feel quite well acquainted with you already," said she, "for Larry has told me so many things of you."

Ross blushed slightly as he replied that Larry was his best and oldest friend.

"Yes, I was inclined to be jealous of you at first, for he sung your praises in season and out, and he never had a story to tell in which your name did not enter. You seemed to be his ideal of goodness in man."

"I know," laughed Ross, "that Larry always had some ridiculous notions about me. Just because I was a bit studious and a trifle grave he gave me credit for a hundred virtues I did not possess."

"I know he is always comparing himself to you to his own disparagement."

"And for that reason you were rather prejudiced against me, rather inclined to find me a disagreeable, methodical kind of a chap, were you not?"

"No, not exactly," she replied, with a shy smile; "but I wasn't altogether prejudiced in your favor. But," turning a frank and smiling face to his, "I am going to be honest with you. I like you now, and we will be friends, shall we not?"

And, without thinking where they were, she held out

her hand, which Ross grasped in some confusion, and with a glow at his heart which he could not suppress.

"Here, here!" cried Larry, who had noticed this little drama. "What's all this? Do you suppose I am to allow this right under my eyes, and on the day of my wedding, too? Ross, you foxy old rascal! what do you mean? You're a pretty friend! You're a nice *best man!* Who was the man who was always preaching to me about flirting, etc.? And then to come to my wedding in this capacity, and before I have been married an hour, go to flirting disgracefully with my wife! I'm ashamed of you! That's what I am—ashamed of you!"

All eyes were turned upon the discomfited student, who was completely overcome by this unexpected turn of affairs. This was "nuts" for Larry, who enjoyed it hugely, knowing how sensitive Ross was, and he looked around the table, winking, and calling everybody's attention to his chum's red cheeks. But the one who was responsible for the mischief was not at all disturbed. She simply looked up laughingly at her husband's face, and said:

"We were only making a compact of friendship."

The conversation soon took another turn, and was forgotten by all but one of the principal actors. Ross had a chance to recover himself under cover of the general conversation, but all the remainder of the day he was pos-

sessed by a strange, unaccountable feeling — a feeling which he likened to himself to the sensation one would have in discovering a new world or continent, but a world between which and the discoverer rolled a deep, unfathomable flood. At one moment he wanted to spring to his feet and rush forth into the open air and sunshine, to revel in his new discovery; but the next he sank back, bitterly realizing that the discovery was valueless to him. The mine had been pre-empted before he knew of its existence; the pure, free gold was to pour into the lap of another whom he feared was incapable of appreciating or refining it.

And the lawyer returned to his office, with its somber rows of russet-colored books, its pigeon-holes of musty papers, its cold, cheerless walls and its lonesomeness. Why had it never appeared this way to him before? He had never felt the loneliness of his life till now. His books and his work had been sufficient for him; but, somehow, to-night, as he sat in the dusk, with his head bowed upon his hand, a vision kept dancing before his eyes. A vision of a room lighted by soft, shaded lamps, a fire dancing merrily on the hearth; books and pictures, pictures and books everywhere; children playing before the fire, and a woman's figure presiding and dominating over all—a woman's face, which, more than the dancing fire-light, more than the shaded lamps, illuminated and

filled the room with pure yet penetrating light—the light of love, the light of home.

How dark the streets seemed that night; how lonely the houses looked; how little there seemed to live for; how empty all that he had deemed most worth working for! If he should gain the very summit of his ambition—what then? And one day had changed it all!

CHAPTER X.

Dr. Larry Reynolds was the name on the sign which was fastened over the door of a pretty little cottage which sat well back from the street and had a rose garden in front of it, fragrant just now with countless roses of every variety, from the tea to the jacqueminot. It was not merely a house, a place of shelter, but it was a home, as could be seen by the tasteful draperies, its window-seats, and broad, welcoming doors. Larry's wife had every faculty necessary to fill the house with cheerful, hopeful love, and to smooth the little mountains of friction and trouble of every-day life into the level plain of tranquillity and peace. While Larry prescribed for the physical aches and pains she assuaged the mental worries and nervous, imaginative troubles. Hers was, as Ross had imagined, almost an ideal nature, and it would have been difficult, on short acquaintance, to pick a flaw in her: beautiful as the conception of the poetic fancy of an artist; impetuous, yet thoughtful of the feelings and happiness of others; gay and *riante*, yet earnest and sincere in everything she undertook; loving amusement with a child's love, and yet deeply religious.

But she had her weak point. There was an unprotected joint in her armor; her love was Italian in its fierceness, and as exacting as the love of the passionate senoritas of sunny Italy. Where she loved she brooked no interference; she would allow no invasion of her rights; every particle of the loved one's affection must be shed on her, every iota of his care and attention must be accounted for.

Almost from the first, Larry stepped into a good practice. Whether it was his cheeriness and *bonhomie*, or whether he was really a skillful physician, I do not know; but family after family attached itself to him, until he had all he could swing, and his reputation spread—for nothing succeeds like success, even in medicine. It was only now and then that he was called to sign a burial certificate.

It must be admitted that his wife was jealous of the time he spent away from her in the practice of his profession; but there seemed no way to prevent that, and so she resigned herself to the inevitable, though sometimes, when he was called to attend some young and pretty woman, she felt a strange, sharp contraction of the heart.

Larry gradually fell into the rut of hard work and ceaseless visits which a country practice entails. Had any one told him a few years before that he would be contented to settle down in this way, his wife his only com-

panion, his newspaper, book, and pipe his only recreation, he would have laughed incredulously; but so it was. Now and then he wondered what Ross would say if he could see him thus engrossed in work and devoting himself faithfully to one woman. He kept up a ragged correspondence with his chum, but since his marriage Ross's letters had become less and less frequent, and the intervals between were longer and longer. The few that did arrive were stiff and formal, and seemed written simply to fulfill a duty, and were far from the bright letters he was wont to write. There was an element of coldness, a mysterious something which entered into them, a lack of the old boyish candor. Larry was surprised and hurt by it, but could think of no cause, unless it was his marriage; but apparently he had approved of his wife most decidedly at the time of the wedding. Surmising, however, that this might be the case, he seldom mentioned his wife in his letters, and Ross, for reasons of his own, never spoke of her when he wrote.

Days rolled into weeks, weeks into months, and months accumulated into years; every day brought new patients, every month an increase of care, each year an accumulation of responsibility. It is the pet idea of the successful business or professional man that there is a good time coming, in which he will have leisure to travel, read, enjoy himself, recreate, make the best of his abili-

ties. The wings of his imagination carry him bounding toward the ideals and ambitions of his youth. But the time never comes, the opportunity never materializes. The more successful he is, the less chance that his dreams will ever be realized; and perhaps it is well to have this beacon luring us on, this will-o'-the-wisp ever dancing before us. If we knew that we should live and die in the same rut of busy cares that we are working in, if we could look into the future and see that our life was always to be as humdrum as that of our neighbors, we should "lay down the shovel and the hoe," and pray to join "old Uncle Ned."

Larry became a steady, industrious practitioner, and, take it all in all, his life was a happy one. When a man has a successful and increasing business or profession, when he feels himself a power in the community, and notes that as the years pass he is making a broader mark on the records of time, cutting an ever wider swath as the scythe of experience becomes stronger, keener, and better-tempered, he can but enjoy an inner satisfaction, especially when, at evening, after a hard day's work, he can return to a loving wife, a sympathetic companion, and, donning the dressing-gown of ease and the slippers of comfort, toast his shins before the cheery fire of contentment, while the winds of trouble and adversity blow harmlessly against the pane outside.

But Larry's reformation wasn't absolutely complete, and there were moments, it must be confessed, when there crept into his heart a little longing for something more exciting than the amputation of a leg or a post-mortem examination; a desire to get away for a brief time from the humdrum of country practice to enjoy the excitements and fevers of metropolitan life. He hungered for the flesh-pots of Egypt—and who does not, once in awhile? Who is there but has sometimes a thirst for a long-desired pleasure, a panting for the delicious wickednesses of life from which we are debarred by our consciences and the encircling lives which surround us? We know we shall never enjoy them, that if they were placed right within our reach we should not taste them; but we often go to sleep with the dream wandering aimlessly through our minds, to be taken up by our sleeping fancies and worked by the magic pencil of somnolence into strange, airy, and beautiful realities, through whose mazes we wander on the wings of elysium.

CHAPTER XI.

During his college years, and while he was pursuing his medical studies, Larry had visited nearly every part of the United States, and had taken a summer's trip abroad. Being well supplied with funds, there were few pleasures or amusements which he had not tasted. Now and then there were times when the recollection of these past pleasures swept over him like a tidal wave, and the fragrance of the spray of unforgotten delights intoxicated his brain. At such moments his wife would watch his expressive face and wonder jealously and anxiously what happy thoughts were stealing his mind from the present and from her. She knew by woman's keen intuition that his thoughts were not of her, and gradually they gave rise to suspicion and fear.

Whenever she saw him in one of these brown studies she grew uneasy and was unhappy for days. She fell to brooding and guessing, and all the train of jealous torments which follow in the train of such forebodings stung and pinched her as with fiery pincers.

This desire to visit once more the scene of his former pleasures and triumphs grew upon Larry until it became a

mania, and in order to quench his longing he at last resolved to visit New York. But how to carry out the plan? He had never been away since his marriage without taking his wife with him, and he feared that the very fact of his wanting to go alone would make her unhappy and suspicious. He was much surprised, therefore, when he broached the subject of his visit to his wife to find that she quietly acquiesced in it, and made no objection whatever. This relieved his mind of a great burden, and he went about his preparations for departure. He did not notice the sorrowful look in her eyes, nor the watchful scrutiny with which she examined his face. He could not perceive the storm of fear, doubt, and anguish which really agitated the little woman's heart, nor the paroxysms of grief to which she gave way when alone.

At last the date set for his trip arrived, and Larry took the train after bidding his wife an affectionate goodbye. She seemed very quiet and unconcerned, he thought, and he was rather piqued by it; but was still glad not to have a scene, which was what he had feared. His excuse for the trip was the purchase of a set of surgical instruments, those which he had being slightly antiquated and hardly up to date.

Lest the reader should do this young man an injustice, let me say that Larry's motives in taking this trip were really not very bad. He really needed the instruments,

and he proposed to make them the excuse for a little harmless diversion, a few visits to the theater, a ball or two, a convivial dinner with a bottle of extra dry. That was all. Surely nothing very bad about that, and probably, if he had frankly told his wife of his craving for a little excitement of this kind, she would have told him to "go and behave himself;" but he lacked just that firmness of character which would have enabled him to boldly declare his wishes, and hid his real purpose behind a partially fictitious screen of necessity. Larry was naturally open and honest, and in carrying out this partial subterfuge he probably showed in his face and actions to the keen eyes of his wife that he was hiding something from her.

His train left at half-past three in the afternoon, and comfortably ensconced in the smoking-compartment of the Pullman, with a good novel and a fragrant Havana between his teeth, he was hurried on his way to New York. At 7:30 the same evening another train left the city for the same point, and just before it pulled out of the station, a closely veiled woman in a snug traveling-suit stepped out of the waiting-room and quickly entered the car. No one, with the possible exception of the station-master, who looked at her keenly, seemed to recognize her; but if Larry Reynolds had been there he would have started with amazement probably.

This train followed its predecessor swiftly, but the veiled lady read no book nor raised her veil. She only stared steadily out into the gathering darkness, and followed with her eye the reflection of the train lights which sped along parallel to her window in an endless race.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next day, in one of the rooms of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, a young woman was intently examining a morning paper. She seemed to be hunting for something, which at last fell under her eye; for she bent over the sheet and glanced hastily down a column, then suddenly she paused and read aloud:

"Larry Reynolds, C——, N. H."

The column she was examining was the list of hotel arrivals at the leading hotels of the city—that column which is the means of many an *exposé*. And the hotel whose register was graced with Larry's flowing signature was the Hoffman House, almost within a stone's-throw of where she was sitting.

Yes, Larry was at the Hoffman. He had arrived early that morning, taken the best room he could get, eaten a sumptuous breakfast, strolled into the magnificent bar of the house and admired the many really valuable works of art, including the great painting for which the house is famous, and which he examined through the amber lights of an American cocktail; and then walked slowly down to his old chum's office, thoroughly enjoying the sense of

freedom, the crowded streets, the rattle of the carriages, the hurrying crowds of people of every degree, and all the thousand and one sights and sounds of metropolitan life.

Ross was of course surprised and overjoyed to see Larry, and, throwing his books into a corner, prepared to devote himself to entertaining and enjoying his friend. When they had lighted their cigars and got their feet sufficiently elevated to allow their brains to work easily and smoothly, Ross said:

"Of course I am deucedly glad to see you, but I can't help being a little curious, and asking the rather impertinent question, 'What are you here for?'"

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Larry, deliberately. "First, to have a little fun, a bit of relaxation, a slight relief from the routine of country practice, and incidentally to pick up a few surgical instruments."

"Your wife is with you, I suppose," said Ross, rather guardedly, and in a careless manner.

"No, I'm alone. To tell the truth, I came over to have a little fling, a bit of sport that I wouldn't care to have my wife participate in or know of."

"Larry—" began Ross, with a pained look in his eyes.

"Oh, you needn't put on that look, nor think I'm going to do anything I'd be ashamed of. I won't even break a commandment. My fun will be of the harmless kind, in which your saintship can join without soiling

your wings, and will consist more in watching others enjoy themselves than in participating ourselves."

"Well," said Ross, "if that's your object, I'm with you, and we'll see what we can see;" and a relieved expression softened the grim lines of his mouth. "I perceive, by the odor of Tom Gin and orange-peel that accompanied you into the room, that you have already begun your harmless fun, and had your matutinal cocktail, and probably followed it by a luxurious breakfast; so I won't ask you to eat anything till later."

"Yes, my dear boy. I have offended my country-bred stomach with one of the Hoffman House concoctions, and gorged myself sufficiently for a few hours. Now, what are you going to do to amuse me?"

A comical expression spread over Ross's face.

"I don't know. When a man comes to New York with such intentions as yours he ought to apply to one of the gilded youth. It is hardly complimentary to me. I take it you don't care to visit the Metropolitan Gallery, nor make calls on any of the 'Four Hundred,' and that a ride on the 'elevated' would hardly satisfy your craving for excitement."

"Right you are, old boy! None of that for me. Well, if you don't know what to do, I will take the helm. You never did have any faculty of amusing yourself. I always had to knock any kind of fun into you with a club.

I'll just map out a programme for to-day, to begin with, and then, by to-morrow, I'll have something else thought out."

"For Heaven's sake! how long are you going to stay?" cried Ross, pretending to be dismayed at the thought of a succession of such days as he could see before him.

"I don't know—week or two, possibly," said Larry, enjoying his friend's tribulations.

"I'll stand it as long as I can, Larry, but don't be surprised if I leave you in the lurch and turn up missing some morning."

"I won't let you escape. Never fear!"

"What's your first move?" asked Ross, eying his old chum with internal amusement, and noticing that he had lost none of his college ways and manners.

"There isn't much we can do till night, but we'll hire the best rig we can get for money, and drive the balance of the afternoon. As soon as I finish this cigar I'll go and get the team. Wouldn't trust you to pick out a wheelbarrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

When Ross, summoned by a boy to come down to the sidewalk, arrived at the street, he saw Larry perched upon the driver's seat of a high drag, to which was attached a tandem of very English-looking cobs, the very cobbiest of cobs, with harness heavy enough for a dump cart. With an inward hope that none of his friends or clients would see him, Ross climbed up beside his friend and away they sped, up through Fifth Avenue and out toward Central Park. Larry enjoyed it hugely, and being a good driver, kept the spirited horses moving at a lively gait, and his tongue likewise.

The terminus of their drive was Delmonico's, where Larry drew up in fine style, and they were soon laboriously engaged in eating their way through a most intricate bill of fare laid out by the gentleman from the country. Larry insisted on sampling all the most costly and luxurious wines, and gradually a warm south of France feeling began to steal over them, and a mantle of satisfaction and geniality, a kind of mental beatitude, spread over the twain.

Two front orchestra-chairs at the opera bouffé that evening were graced by these amiable gentlemen, and a delicate but highly spiced supper afterward sent them to

bed some hours after the town clock in Larry's native town had pealed the midnight hour.

For two or three days our friends continued this sort of thing, changing their dining-place each day, and sipping the honey which lies so temptingly exposed to the bill of the man with money in his purse. But Ross soon tired of it. It was unsuited to his taste, and he longed for the quiet of his dreary office and the companionship of his books. During the afternoon of the fourth day he told Larry frankly that he had had enough, and if he, Larry, wanted more, he must go it alone. After some demurring, the latter concluded to make one more night of it, and then leave for home the following day.

His plans had been made for this night for some days, and while he would have been glad of Ross's company, still he felt amply able to find a little amusement by himself. I think every man likes now and then to get off by himself, and be absolutely independent; having no one to consult, no one to object. Even the best of friends sometimes tire one, and their well-meant protestations and remonstrances are offensive.

While reading his paper at breakfast on the morning of his arrival, he had noticed that the Arion Ball, the annual masked ball of the society of that name, was to be held that night, and for years Larry had longed to see one of these balls, which are the talk of the town, and fill col-

umns of newspapers all over the country for days after they have occurred. Convivial spirits come from every part of the land to attend them, and if they don't have a good time it is not their fault. All his life Larry had heard of them, and of the entertaining and diverting performances to be seen there, and the moment his eyes fell on this advertisement he resolved to be present. He did not mention it to Ross, for fear he would oppose it, and he had decided to go, and go alone.

After leaving his chum, he spent part of the afternoon in purchasing the instruments for which he had ostensibly come to New York, and then looked up a theatrical costumer, in order to get a rig for the ball. Costume after costume was shown him, but he was rather finicky about it, and could not find one to suit him, until he happened to notice in a case a lot of uniforms. When asked about them, the proprietor said they were uniforms which had been used by an opera troupe, and were all in good condition. Larry tried on several which were exactly alike, and finally found one that fitted him to perfection. It was the uniform of a mounted hussar, with the chapeau, tight-fitting coat, trousers, top-boots, etc. After ordering the outfit sent to his rooms, he made his way back to the hotel.

A little before the hour advertised for the ball, Larry stepped into a carriage, a heavy cloak thrown over his uni-

form. As he closed the door he noticed a coupé standing just to the rear of his, as though waiting for some one, but thought nothing of it, as it was customary to see a line of carriages at the entrance. If, however, he had looked back, he would have noticed that the coupé followed his, and that every now and then a woman's head was thrust out of the open window to see if his carriage was in sight.

When his cab stopped at the entrance to the theater, the one behind drew up also, and a closely veiled woman followed him up the steps and through the wide-open doors, through which crowds of men and women were hurrying. Carriages were arriving from every direction, emptying their loads of laughing, elbowing people, all closely muffled and each one with bowed head, in order to keep his or her identity from his neighbor.

In the broad entrance halls and stairways all was hurry and confusion. The laughing, pushing crowd jostled each other good-naturedly as they poured on toward the dressing-rooms. Larry allowed himself to be carried by the stream up the broad stairs and on into the rooms set apart for the gentlemen to remove their coats and prepare for the masquerade. He looked curiously at the people about him, trying to make out what sort of an assemblage he was in. He wondered what class and condition of men attended these balls. But every one was so carefully wrapped and veiled that their faces were invisible. Even the men had their

coat collars turned up high so as to hide their faces. So he had to satisfy himself by scanning their dress and watching their manners. It occurred to him, however, that you could hardly judge a person by his or her manners at a ball like this where they had come with the express idea of having a lark, and would be likely to act as badly as they dared.

Nearly all were well-dressed, many richly, and their manners, while a trifle boisterous, were within bounds.

When he, with his unknown companions, reached the dressing-rooms set apart for the gentlemen, the work of removing coats and wraps began, but before taking off his outside garments and thus exposing himself to any chance acquaintance who might be present, he followed the example of those near him and adjusted his mask. When the coats were thrown off, a motley assemblage was disclosed, and many a sly and smothered laugh was evoked as the occupants of the room examined each other.

Larry looked very handsome in his hussar uniform, which fitted him to perfection, and his blonde hair peeped out from under his cap in a most captivating fashion. When he had buckled on his sword, he walked by the cheval glass, and felt a good deal of satisfaction at the figure there represented. His tall and erect form, his broad shoulders and athletic build, were just suited to the costume, and he looked the full-fledged hussar to the life.

CHAPTER XIV.

His mask securely fastened he strolled out of the dressing-room with a feeling of security and pleasure. In the great ball-room all was movement, glitter and excitement. Though it was early yet, the hall was well filled, and the strains of a dreamy, rhymthic waltz fell softly upon the pulsating air; while on every side great tropical plants, beds of flowers and masses of foliage intoxicated the senses with their dewy fragrance. Thousands of electric lights peeped from among the leaves, shedding lambent flames of many colors from among the masses of green, and suggesting vistas of rarer beauty and delight beyond. Great "Jack" roses in beds and clusters were swelling wider and wider, and exposing more and more of their entrancing sweetness until the radiant petals could expand no further and the closely guarded heart lay open to the view.

Not only on the floor were the gay maskers to be seen, but the boxes were filled with costumes representing every period of the world's history; white arms gleamed beside black coats, and blue eyes vied with gray in sowing broadcast their dangerous glances. But while Larry reveled in

the music and the wealth of light and fragrance, they but served as the frame to the picture upon which his eye dwelt; they were but the golden lining to the cup; the contents were what fascinated him. His eye wandered over the brilliant scene, gathering in at a glance this patchwork of the grotesque, the severe, the beautiful, the ugly, the ridiculous, the solemn, the dignified and the undignified. The priest hobnobbed with his satanic majesty; the black-veiled nun walked arm in arm with Punch; Marie Antoinette whispered with Dr. Jekyll; Lord Dundreary chaffed Macbeth; while the Roman senator waltzed with a ballet girl.

Movement, action, hilarity, excitement, glistening eyes, sharp questions, quick retorts; here a loud burst of laughter; there a chorus of applause; dancing, singing, chaffing; each one following his bent, and all making the most of the flying hours; and the red wine flowed, and the pop of the champagne cork was like the patter of rain on a tin roof, softened and subdued by distance and the sound of music, and the champagne stirred the heart's blood, and the blood rushed through the veins, and set the feet in motion and the brain on fire, and—

Into the thickest of it wandered our country physician, enjoying the scene to its full. Here was life, here the pulses stirred, here was intoxication for all the senses. What mattered it for the moment that there was a to-

morrow, that there was a hereafter. He breathed in the heavy-scented, music-laden air, he opened the portals of his brain to allow the waves of melody to roll through. He gazed on beautiful women, who took no pains to hide their physical loveliness; white arms, snowy bosoms, lustrous eyes and twinkling feet surrounded him and hemmed him in on every side. He could not escape if he would, and would not if he could. He felt as though he was sinking into an ocean of incense; as though the sirens with their pearly arms and fathomless eyes were drawing him down to some satanic paradise; but he had no desire to resist; he yielded most readily to the beckoning hands; he welcomed their warm breath on his cheek.

In all this magic scene he felt himself simply a passive onlooker, a mere spectator carried on with the stream, nor tried to take a part. Flashing eyes were tempting him to join the mad dancers at every turn, and empty seats beside snowy loveliness stared him in the face from many a flowery grotto; but he had no idea of passing certain bounds which he had set before him, and the intoxicating revel swept on and left him unharmed. He had come simply to see it, to enjoy it, to bask in it—nothing more.

So absorbed had he been in the enjoyment of the scene that he had not noticed a woman wearing a plain domino, who had followed him like a shadow from the moment he entered the room, always just behind him, but

near enough to watch every movement and catch every glance of the eye. When he advanced the domino followed; when he stood still the domino was motionless.

Now and then women with bright eyes flashing from beneath their masks stopped him and engaged him in conversation, but after chaffing them for a few moments in a good-natured way, he passed on, not wishing to follow up his opportunities. His part was that of a looker-on, and he did not desire to become an active unit in the fast and furious fun.

As he was slowly wandering about the hall, speculating as to where all these gay and laughing people came from, who they were in private life, what their occupation, station and income, he suddenly started with a look of amused wonder. Right in front of him was a man wearing exactly the same costume as that he had on; but there would have been nothing remarkable in that if his figure, carriage, hair and eyes, and his general appearance had not been the perfect counterpart of his own.

"Well," thought Larry, "this is curious! Here's my double. I've often seen myself in the glass but never in the flesh. I must look him over and see how I look. This man might be my twin brother. Why, he's perfect! and my best friend wouldn't know the differnce, at least with the mask on. I wonder if his face is as much like me as the rest of him? Probably not."

The man, who, like Larry, had rather a military carriage, tall, erect and well proportioned, was talking in a low tone, and evidently very earnestly, to a woman in full evening dress, and her beautiful arms were an indication of other beauties concealed by her mask. She was nervously opening and shutting her fan, while the man leaned toward her and spoke hurriedly close to her ear.

"Here's a little comedy or tragedy going on which I'll watch, for want of something better to do," thought Larry, and he took up his station a few feet away near some flowering plants, where he could see without being observed.

The two talked for a few moments longer, and then, after seemingly coming to some understanding, they separated and walked in different directions. The man appeared preoccupied, and Larry followed him with an idle curiosity. He seemed to have no particular object in view, although he would occasionally look sharply around him as though fearful of being watched. Larry had not been long pursuing this quarry ere he found that he had a companion in the chase. Quite near him, and always keeping at a certain distance from the hussar, was a woman wearing a black domino which completely covered her. Nothing was visible except her hands, which were small and delicate, but he could see a pair of jet black eyes fixed steadily upon the unsuspecting object of their joint pursuit.

"Here's another link in the chain," thought Larry, "and it begins to look more like a tragedy than a comedy, for those black eyes have a very sad look, and are surely dangerously out of place here. What a superb carriage the little woman has! and how she seems to make a path for herself just by a glance or an unconscious movement of the hand. She must be an imperious little thing." And he noticed that one or two men who attempted to draw her into flirtation were quickly sent about their business in a very peremptory fashion.

This little scene within a scene interested Larry immensely, and he dropped all else to watch these two, all unconscious that he in turn was being watched by a pair of ferret-like eyes, looking out from under a brown hood, and that a figure wearing a dark-brown domino, the hood drawn down closely above the mask and gathered in at the neck, was ever at his heels. He never dreamt that he too was playing a part in the tragedy.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT what had become of the beautiful woman whom Larry's double had been talking with, and with whom he seemed to have such a perfect understanding? Larry had kept an eye out for her, as he felt that she was one of the principal actors and that sooner or later she must appear on the scene again. He began to fear she had gone home and that he would be left to simply guess the *dénouement*, but, suddenly, he saw her waltz by, hanging gracefully on the arm of her cavalier, and as she floated swiftly by the hussar she gave him a quick signal with her fan, which was evidently seen, not only by the one for whom it was intended but by the little black domino.

As soon as he perceived this signal the blonde hussar turned and strolled across the hall to the dressing-room, followed by the black domino and Larry. The domino darted into the ladies' dressing-room, and quickly appeared in the hall between the two with her cloak on and her veil over her face in place of her mask. Hurrying into the men's dressing-room, Larry looked around for his double in hopes of seeing his face, but though he was there he missed his object, for the man already had a big ulster on over his uniform, and a soft felt hat pulled down to meet the collar of his coat, thus completely hiding his face.

Larry thought it strange that the man had not noticed him and the strange resemblance, but concluded it was because his mind was so engrossed with the little affair he had on hand.

Wishing to see the thing through, or at least as far as possible, he threw on his coat, and followed the masker into the hall-way. It was not long before he was joined by a closely draped figure, and together they went down the broad stairway, followed always by the black domino and by Larry at a respectful distance. The hussar gave a number to the policeman in attendance, and a carriage soon drove up to the door, into which he handed his companion, and sprung in after her. The door had no sooner banged to than Larry, whose attention was now turned to the black domino, saw her spring to a cab which was near at hand, and after giving a direction to the driver, the carriage sped rapidly after the one in which the hussar and his companion had left.

"There," thought Larry, as he turned back into the hall, "is one of the incidents of life which are constantly occurring but which seldom appear quite so plainly to the public eye. The end is easily foreseen, and the result is inevitable. So much for the weakness and depravity of human nature! What is amusement for one woman is purgatory for the other."

He ventured into the hall again, but somehow the

"salt had lost its savor." The scene did not appear as brilliant as before. There was a false note somewhere in the gayety. There was the ring of untrue metal in the hilarity; Larry could detect an ever-present discord running as an accompaniment to the melodious strains of the orchestra. The scene which he had witnessed would not be banished from his mind. Those sad eyes behind the black mask haunted him, and somehow reminded him of a dear little woman he had left uncomplaining, but disconsolate, at home.

The ball had now reached its height, and the maskers were dancing as though their lives depended on it, and as though his satanic majesty was in their heels. You would have thought the floor was a heated gridiron from the difficulty some of the fair dancers had in keeping their feet on it, and the one who could spend the greatest amount of time in the air received the most applause. The fun was growing hot and furious, the champagne was doing its work, and Larry, after a last glance at the motley crowd, turned toward the exit, pausing to exchange a few words with a flower-girl by the door and buy a bunch of violets. As he did so, the brown domino brushed past him, and the hard, set eyes glared at the not over-innocent face of the flower vender.

After putting the violets in his button-hole he walked slowly down the grand stairway, and the flower-girl, either

thinking that there would be no more sale, or because she had exhausted her stock, closed her basket and went in the same direction.

The stars were gleaming brightly, and after the heat and noise of the ball-room, the clear, crisp air of the winter night was delicious. Refusing the offers of the cabmen, he buttoned his coat to his throat, so as to keep his sword from swinging, and turned toward his hotel, a cigar between his teeth and a moral in his mind.

"This will do for once in awhile," he thought. "It acts as a kind of safety-valve to a man's animal spirits; but, after all, the quiet, busy, uneventful life I had at home, with its every-day incidents, its commonplaceness, its monotony, if you will, is the happiest. I wonder what the little woman is doing to-night? Probably fast asleep, with the moonlight peeping in at her window under the curtain. She would be shocked if she knew what I had been doing, but she need have no fear. I've gone the length of my rope. There's a solid wall around me in every direction made up of stones of self-respect laid in the mortar of my love for her, against which I run when circumstances press me too far, and the rebound carries me back to my better self."

The streets were empty and silent. Once in awhile he passed a policeman slowly walking his beat, with his hands behind his back, or a cab sped by, carrying its tired load

of gay revelers. A flash of its lamps, a rattle over the paving-stones, and they were gone in the distance. He looked round curiously at the silent houses and vacant street. No one in sight but a woman's figure walking slowly at some distance behind him.

"Some poor waif," he thought. "Some outcast from the maelstrom of life."

Reaching the hotel, he passed in at the ladies' entrance, and before the door was closed a woman hurried in and preceded him up the stairs. He followed leisurely, and when he passed the door of the ladies' parlor, the same woman, closely veiled, was sitting by the door, apparently waiting for some one or something.

"Probably has sent for her key," he thought, and passed on to his room.

Had he looked around, he would have seen the woman spring from her seat the moment he had passed and follow him with the tread and noiselessness of a cat. It took many turns and twists to reach his room, and at every corner a head was cautiously thrust out after him, and then, as he turned the next angle, the figure hurried on.

At last he found his number, and, turning the lock, he entered. The door had hardly closed when the veiled figure reached his door, looked at the number, and, after listening a moment, shook her clinched hand at the room

and returned toward the parlor, where she rang for a boy and procured a room.

Larry was not long in throwing off his uniform. As he unbuckled his sword he drew it from its scabbard, wondering whether it was a *bona-fide* one or only a theatrical make-believe. It was a real enough one, however, with a keen, sharp edge, and tempered like a Damascus blade.

"An ugly weapon," laughed Larry. "I'll put it by the head of my bed to scare away ghosts;" and without putting it in the scabbard, he stood it by the head of the bed.

After placing his watch, purse, and other valuables under his pillow, as was his usual custom, and opening the window and transom over the door a crack, in order to have plenty of air, he turned out the gas and jumped into bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

After the excitement of the past few days he felt very tired, and his head had hardly touched the pillow when he sunk into a heavy, dreamless sleep. It seemed to him he had not been asleep ten minutes, when he sprung up in bed, startled by some unusual noise. He had a feeling that he was not alone in the room, and he could hear a stealthy movement somewhere. He peered fiercely into the gloom which filled the chamber, but could see nothing. All sorts of ideas ran through his head, and instinctively his mind sought for some instrument of protection. The sword flashed into his mind, and he stealthily reached out and grasped it by the hilt. With this in hand he felt a little safer, and he was about to speak out, and bring the matter to a focus when, happening to look toward the door, over the top of which a very dim light streamed from the night-lights in the hall, he started with nervousness, and a chill ran down his back, for there, right over the edge of the transom, was a human hand clinging to the wood-work, either in the act of climbing up or else just letting the owner quietly down.

We have already seen that Larry was the creature of

impulse, and on seeing this hand there was but one idea in his head, and that was that the owner of that hand had either robbed him or was about to. His mind was made up in a moment, and springing from his bed as noiselessly as possible, he crept to the door, grasping his sword firmly as he went. The hand was still there. Perhaps the thief was alarmed, and was waiting for the noise to subside, but at any rate there it was. Taking good aim, Larry brought the keen, sharp edge down with all his strength across the wrist.

An agonized moan and a fall on the other side of the door, and at his feet lay a white hand, the fingers clutched spasmodically as the red blood ran from the arteries.

Though this was just what Larry had intended to do, yet, when he saw this ghastly hand lying there so life-like and human, expressing agony in its clutching, he was horrified. Better have been robbed, he thought. For a moment he felt faint and sick, and leaned against the wall, but recovered himself by an effort, and turning the key, he threw open the door, and sprung out into the hall, ready to grapple with the burglar, expecting to find him stretched upon the floor; but the hall was empty; no one was visible. The handless burglar had made his escape, leaving an overturned chair to indicate his means of reaching the transom. Larry hurried down the hall and looked around the next angle, but all was quiet.

At first he thought of making an alarm, but concluded he would get on his clothes and see if he had met with any loss. He knew that by this time the burglar must have made his escape from the hotel.

Hurrying back to the room, he entered fearfully, and closing the door, struck a match and lit the gas. His eyes first sought the floor next the door. He almost hoped he might have been the victim of an hallucination, a fevered dream, a nightmare. But no; there, where it had fallen, with the fingers drawn up as if in agony, was the white hand with the blood slowly oozing from the severed arteries in the wrist. A shiver of horror passed down his spine. He approached it with aversion, surgeon as he was, and after staring at it for a moment, he mastered his feelings and picked up the ghastly trophy of his prowess and swordsmanship. Holding it gingerly between his fingers, he approached the gas, and when the light fell full upon it he started in amazement.

Instead of the rough, stubbed hand of a burglar, he held between his fingers the small, delicate hand of a woman. The fingers were long and shapely, and the wrist slender and round. Upon the third finger was a handsome sapphire and a wedding-ring.

Larry stared at the ghastly sight with a horrified fascination. What had he done? Whom had he crippled for life, and perhaps murdered? What could a woman be

doing, trying to climb over his transom at night? These and a thousand other questions rushed through his brain.

"Could it have been a female thief, the accomplice of some masculine robber? Probably," he thought.

He looked at the long, well-polished nails, the delicate blue veins in the palm, from which the blood was slowly oozing and dripping on the carpet, and visions of unpleasant consequences and unexpected entanglements filled his mind with foreboding.

At last he laid the still warm hand down in the basin and proceeded to examine his belongings to see if he had lost anything. All was as he had left it on going to bed.

Not a thing was missing. So the burglar, if burglar it was, had not made her entrance, but was trying to do so.

Hurrying on his clothes, he debated what to do. Would it be best to alarm the house and have a search made? If the thief were still in the house she would need medical attendance, and that would lead to her detection, and if she had escaped, as she could very easily have done by the ladies' entrance, which could always be opened from the inside, it would be too late now to catch her, as she would undoubtedly have been taken away by her accomplice. He could see no use in making a disturbance, for then the matter would get into the papers and give him an undesirable notoriety. He concluded he would say nothing.

But what to do with this horrid reminder of his midnight escapade?

He thought of various expedients, but none seemed practicable. At last his surgical experience came to his assistance. He remembered several cases in his practice where amputated members had been preserved in alcohol on account of some peculiarity of disease or malformation, and quickly decided that as soon as the shops were open in the morning he would purchase the necessary materials, and take the hand home with him. What an excellent story it would serve to illustrate! And he smiled as he imagined the looks of horror his friends would cast upon it.

In order to prevent further bleeding he took the hand and quickly seared the stump in the flame of the gas jet, and then put it back in the basin till morning.

Then he put the sword back in its scabbard, and with a towel tried to remove the traces of the disgusting affair. The door was spattered with blood, and there was a deep cut in the wood where the blade had penetrated after cleaving through the wrist. On the floor was quite a little pool of blood where the hand had fallen. He washed the stains off the woodwork and wiped them off the floor as well as he could, but they left an ugly blotch on the carpet and a bad streak on the white paint of the door. There is something peculiar about blood. It is almost impossible to remove its stain. Nearly every other kind of stain can be taken

out, but blood leaves an ineradicable trace. It would seem as though it were so arranged by some higher power in order to prevent its being wantonly shed, and to furnish a never-failing finger-post pointing to the perpetrator of the crime.

Slowly the hours dragged by, and they were very unpleasant hours to Larry, you may be sure. All sorts of fears and suspicions rushed through his aching head, and when the first dim light of dawn peeped under the curtain he shrank from it as from the prying eye of a detective. But what had he done? Nothing, surely, but defend himself and his property from a thief and murderess, perhaps.

Impatiently he walked the floor until his watch told him the apothecary shops would be open, and then, locking his door behind him, he hurried out. The overturned chair in the hall had been carried away by some chambermaid, who no doubt wondered how it came there.

Entering the first druggist's he came to, he procured a bell-mouthed bottle which would hold about a quart, and had it filled with alcohol.

Returning to his room he took the unwelcome hand, dropped it into the bottle, and pressed the cork in as tightly as possible, and then, after a last look at the ghastly hand with its glistening rings and clinched fingers reaching up out of the colorless fluid, like the fatal hand which came up out of the lake and grasped Arthur's sword and

drew him down to death, he stowed the flask at the bottom of his trunk and covered it up with clothes. After this was done he felt a little better, a trifle relieved, and washing his hands, went down to breakfast.

When he had given his order, and while he was waiting for it to be served, he stepped out to the news-stand, and bought a morning paper with the idea of reading an account of the ball of the preceding evening.

The first thing that struck his eye as he unfolded the damp sheet was a great staring headline:

TERRIBLE MURDER!

A Woman Found Butchered in Cold Blood on Twenty-Third Street.

Her Right Hand cut off at the Wrist and Carried Away by the Murderer.

No Trace of the Murderer, and as yet the Woman Unidentified.

Larry started as though he had been shot, and a cold sweat covered his forehead. His heart sank like lead. Then he was a murderer! He, Larry Reynolds, had taken the life of a human being, and a woman at that! He could not realize it. A mist swam before his eyes and the room whirled around him.

What would the world say? What would his wife say, and what would the upshot of the matter be? Did it mean

hanging, or state-prison for life, or a long term of years and lasting shame and disgrace?

By a great effort he pulled himself together and tried to look the situation in the face. His first inclination was to go to the nearest police station, confess the whole thing, and give himself up; for no matter what his provocation had been, no matter if the woman had been trying to enter his room, his hand had dealt the blow, his rash act had caused her to bleed to death, and there must be an explanation, an accounting, and perhaps a punishment. It depended on what view the jury took of it. Would they decide that he had been justified or not?

As I have said, his first inclination was to go and give himself up, but then the fear of the disgrace caused him to look for some other way out of the difficulty, some means of escape.

His breakfast came, but he could not eat it, and seizing the paper he hurried to his room, where he read with anguish the particulars so far as they were known.

They were rather meager. The paper stated that a policeman had found the body on the sidewalk where she had fallen, probably, when struck by the murderer. She was described as of medium height, dark eyes and hair, olive complexion, and very beautiful. She was well but not richly dressed, and had evidently been to the Arion Ball, as she wore a brown domino under her cloak and

had a mask in her pocket. What the object of the murderer could have been in cutting off the woman's hand was hard to conjecture. It might have been to get valuable diamonds on the fingers, but the woman did not have the appearance of one who would be possessed of such jewels, and even if she had been, a finger or two cut off would have answered as well as the whole hand. The police inferred that the murderer must have struck her with a sand bag and stunned her first, and then cut off her hand, and it was their opinion that she died from the loss of blood rather than from the blow, as her skull was not fractured.

She had evidently come to her senses and tried to stanch the flow from the arteries, for a handkerchief was tied tightly around the arm just above the wrist in the manner of a tourniquet, and a steel hair ornament twisted through the knot showed some knowledge of surgery.

One item particularly interested Larry, and that was that two of the best detectives in New York had the case in hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER an hour of feverish thought he made up his mind to try and escape the responsibility, but if he were discovered, to face the music and confess. He felt that it would be better and more manly to go and give himself up at once, but his courage failed him. He also thought of going to Ross for advice, and he afterward regretted that he had not done so, but he could not bear to face his chum with such a story.

So he began to make his preparations for departure. His clothes were all packed, and all he had to do was to return the costume which he had worn the night before to the costumer, and pay his bill.

He made a package of the uniform, putting in the sword with a shiver, and carried it to the costumer, to whom he delivered it with a sense of relief to have the hateful and fateful things out of his possession. Then he returned to his hotel, paid his bill, summoned a carriage, and after writing a note to Ross to inform him of his being called home on business, and despatching it by messenger, he sprang into a coupé. Upon reaching the Grand Central Depot he purchased his ticket, got his

trunk checked, and sunk back into his seat in the Pullman with a sigh of relief. How glad he would be to see the last of New York! How different were his feelings on leaving from what they had been on arriving! He had come with a light, jubilant, boy-like gayety, and he was leaving with a heart as heavy as lead, and the blood of a woman on his conscience.

There were yet five minutes before it was time for the train to leave, and Larry was looking impatiently at his watch, when a thick-set man with a heavy beard hurriedly entered the car, and, after looking with a keen eye over all the occupants, stepped quickly up to him, and bending down, whispered:

"Is this Mr. Larry Reynolds?"

Larry's face blanched as he answered:

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I am Detective White of the Metropolitan Police. You are suspected of being implicated in the murder on Twenty-third Street, last night. You had better come quietly with me to headquarters, and then, if you can clear yourself, you can, of course, go free."

Larry summoned up all his courage, and taking his satchel, went out of the car with the detective. On the platform was another officer in citizen's clothes, and, together, they walked to a closed carriage which was waiting outside. Not a word was spoken as they drove to head-

quarters, and the officers very politely ushered him into the presence of the chief.

This officer was a shrewd but kindly looking man, and turning to the prisoner, he said:

"You have been arrested by my men on suspicion of being implicated in the murder which occurred on Twenty-third Street, last night. If you can give a satisfactory explanation or prove an alibi you will be released, but if not, I shall have to hold you for further examination. He ceased speaking, and looked intently at the prisoner, awaiting his reply. He seemed surprised and pained to see a man of such fine appearance and with so honest and open a face charged with such a crime.

Now was the crucial moment. Larry's mouth was dry, and his lips refused their office. He was about to convict himself by his own admission and brand himself with disgrace. Then who could tell whether the jury would believe his story as to the details of the matter. He had no proof, only his simple and unaided word.

At last, by a mighty effort, he raised his eyes and said:

"I am the man. You need look no further."

"Excuse me," interrupted the chief. "I must warn you that what you say here will be used against you at the trial. You are not obliged to commit yourself."

"I am aware of that," answered Larry, "but I wish to make a clean breast of it. I have nothing to conceal."

"Then you may relate the details."

And in a low but distinct tone Larry told the strange and horrible story of the past night. As he proceeded, he kept his eye on the chief to see how it was received, and his heart sank when he perceived that, kindly and manly as he was, he did not believe. It was evident the chief thought that Larry had invented this tale as an explanation for a pure case of murder. So sure was he that he was doubted that his voice became almost inaudible, and at last he sank on a seat, too weak to stand up under the strain.

He had his preliminary examination, and was held for trial; was searched, and sent to the Tombs. His trunk-check, found in his pocket, was taken by the officers. At his request word was sent to Ross Valentine, and he had hardly been placed in his cell ere his friend was announced.

He hurried forward with indignation in his eye.

"What does this mean, Larry, old man? How in the world did you get here? There must be some mistake, and I'll have you out in no time."

Larry silently wrung his hand. It did seem so good to see a friend and hear a friendly, cheery voice.

"No, Ross, there's no mistake. It's only too real and true. You've read the morning papers, of course, and seen the account of the murder. I killed the woman, but

—hold on!—hold on!"—seeing Ross shrink back in horror —"don't go too far. Before you condemn me hear the whole story."

Ross sat down without a word, and waited with staring eyes for the explanation. Once more Larry went over it, though the details had become loathsome to him.

When he had finished he looked up at Ross who had not said a word during the whole time. He found his eyes intently fixed on his face as though they would read his soul.

"Larry, upon your honor, are these the exact facts? Have you hidden nothing?"

"Ross, I give you my word of honor, that they are the exact truth, with nothing held back."

"I believe you! I believe you! and I should have done the same thing under the same circumstances; any man would. But of course it is deucedly unfortunate the woman died, as it leaves you in a bad place. Your story is hard to prove. There were no witnesses, you see."

"No," answered Larry, in a disconsolate tone. "I saw that from the first. I shall probably be convicted and have to suffer the consequences. But, Ross, my wife! Just think of it! She will pick up the evening paper, and there, in great black letters, read her husband's disgrace, the ruin of her future. Oh! it is too much! Poor little woman!"

"Come, come, old man! Pull yourself together! It isn't so dark as it looks. Your wife will never believe you guilty."

Larry sat in deep thought for a moment or two, and then, turning to his friend, said:

"Ross, I want you to go to her on the next train, and explain it to her."

Ross's face flushed a deep red. He hesitated.

"I can't do that, Larry. I will write to her, or, better still, you write her the full truth about the matter."

"No, you must go to her. You must do this for me. You can't refuse it. Go to her and comfort her."

Ross looked down, and his hands clasped and unclasped nervously. Finally, he looked up and said quietly:

"I'll go on the next train, and return at once to look after your case. Now, just keep up your courage. I'll bring you out all right. It's always darkest just before the dawn."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE two days that Ross was gone seemed interminable to Larry in his miserable cell. He could not sleep, and the hours dragged slowly by like one long nightmare. Every time he heard a step in the corridor he thought it must be some one with a letter or telegram from his wife; but none came. Why this silence? It was unlike her. She should have been the first to fly to his assistance.

At last the time which Larry knew was requisite for Ross's trip to New Hampshire expired, and he began to watch and listen for his return. His patience was at last rewarded, and Ross's well-known step was heard approaching, but it was not so quick and sprightly as usual. There was a drag, an unwillingness, a hesitation in it. Larry had been listening so long that sounds had the eloquence of words to him.

At last the steps reached the cell door, and Ross was admitted by the keeper, who remained outside. One glance at his chum's face told Larry that some additional trouble was in store for him, some further misery. There was an expression of gloomy anxiety, a troubled foreboding, and he looked silently at Larry without saying a word.

"What is it, Ross? Speak out! this suspense is killing me. Let me know the worst."

"Has your wife been here?"

"Been here?—no! Of course she hasn't. What do you mean?"

"She is not at home. No one there knows where she is."

Larry stared at his friend in stupid amazement, and could not utter a word.

"She left home," continued Ross, "the same day you did, and took the train south, the station-agent told me."

"What does it mean, Ross?" gasped Larry. "Where can she have gone? Perhaps she has gone to visit her mother?"

"No," answered Ross. "I wired her mother, and they replied that she was not there."

For some moments neither spoke a word. Larry seemed completely crushed by this unexpected blow. There seemed no end to his troubles. And this was so strange, so mysterious, so unexpected, so unlike his wife. At last, he looked up and said:

"Ross, you must find her for me. I can't help thinking that her disappearance is in some way connected with my going away. I feel responsible for it."

"But, Larry, I must devote my time to preparing your case, to getting you out of this miserable mess."

"Oh, never mind me. Find my wife. See that she is safe and well and I'll take care of myself. Oh, what a fool I've been!" groaned poor Larry. "How could I ever leave her and get into such a vile scrape? If I were only free to go in search of her!"

"Your time's up, sir!" said the turnkey, who had been patiently waiting at the cell door.

"Keep up your courage, Larry," said Ross. "I must go now, but you know me well enough to believe I will leave no stone unturned to solve this mystery and get you out of this unfortunate scrape."

"I know it, Ross, I know it, but I am completely unmanned and broken by what has happened. Remember, that your first duty is to my wife. Poor little woman! Where can she be?"

An hour later Ross was closeted with two of the shrewdest detectives in New York. To one he detailed the duty of finding Larry's wife, and to the other the task of gathering evidence which would prove Larry's story of the way in which the woman met her death.

The time for preparation of the case was limited, as the accident, or murder, had happened but a week before the regular session of the court was to take place at which he would be tried. The murder had occasioned great excitement on account of the place in which it had occurred, the beauty of the victim, and the peculiar and mysterious

manner of her death. The standing of the self-confessed murderer, too, added not a little to the interest the public felt in the case.

Ross threw himself into the case heart and soul. Sleep and he were strangers; night and day he toiled at it. He had daily, yes, almost hourly, reports from his detectives; but their success was very meager.

He had been able to track Larry's wife to Boston, but from there all trace of her disappeared, and she was as completely lost as though she had been swallowed by the Atlantic Ocean. His non-success in this direction was a great grief to Ross, as well as to his client. It added an element of mystery to the already tangled skein of mysterious circumstances, and prevented his giving his entire attention to the work of exonerating his friend as he would like to have done. Larry was completely broken and discouraged. He seemed to have lost all interest in his own acquittal, and was of no use to Ross in his endeavors.

The day of the trial came. The court-room was filled to suffocation. The judge was in his place, the jury in their chairs, the attorneys ready with their books and papers. Ross was among them, an anxious and care-worn expression upon his face. He looked discouraged. His efforts had been nearly fruitless. He had neither succeeded in finding the missing wife nor gathered evidence enough to corroborate Larry's story. All he had to rely

on, practically, was his client's version of the affair, and naturally that would not count for much.

Ross kept his eye on the door expectantly, as did most of those present; and just as the audience were getting impatient the sheriff entered with the prisoner. A murmur of surprise swept over the crowd when they caught sight of the accused. Could this fair-haired, open-browed man with the honest, debonair face be a murderer? It hardly seemed possible, and the sympathies of the people, which before had been enlisted against him, turned in his favor.

Larry looked listlessly around the room as he entered, a blush of shame mantling his cheek as he realized his position. He took his seat in the dock, and exchanged a few words with Ross, who approached him, and then after a plea of not guilty to the charge of murder the prosecuting attorney opened the case for the State, which was followed by the witnesses for the prosecution.

The clerk of the hotel testified to Larry's engaging the room; the costumer produced the uniform which the prisoner had hired, and showed the sword with the blood-stain still on it; the doorkeeper at the hotel testified that Larry had come in at about two, with a long ulster on, and that about the same time a strange woman had entered and hurried by him upstairs, and that a few hours after the same woman had gone out again, evidently in great haste.

The chamber-maid testified to the blood-stains on the

floor in Larry's room, and upon the towels, and also to the cut or dent in the door casing.

A policeman testified to finding the murdered woman upon the sidewalk on Twenty-third Street, and a physician who was summoned gave his opinion that, although it was improbable that with the tourniquet round the arm the woman could have bled to death, still it was possible that the shock and loss of blood together might have caused her death. No other wounds except a contusion on the head and a slight blue mark on the neck, which might have been occasioned by her fall, were discovered.

But the most ghastly and damning piece of evidence was the severed hand, which the detectives found in the bottle at the bottom of Larry's trunk, which, of course, they had had returned and opened. It could hardly be explained away, and Larry's statement that he kept it and put it in the bottle because he did not know what else to do with it, and because it was a surgical curiosity, did not satisfy the minds of the jury. They could not understand the workings of a surgeon's mind, nor the peculiar interest such things have for him.

As the case proceeded, and witness after witness was examined, things began to look blacker, and the outlook was dark indeed. There seemed to be a well-defined case of deliberately planned murder made out against his client, and Ross's heart was very low.

Still he struggled on, and cross-examined the State's witnesses with the greatest care and skill, hoping to bring out some point favorable to his friend, or get hold of some thread which would lead to an untangling of the snarled and complicated skein.

The testimony he had to offer was meager and of little account. His principal witness was Larry himself, and he told his story in such a listless, careless, dogged manner that it prejudiced the mind of every hearer against him. He did not weaken on cross-examination, but he was, to say the least, a poor witness. He seemed to have made up his mind that his story would not be believed, and did not seem to care whether it was or not. When he had been hauled over the coals by the opposing counsel, he sat down, rested his head on his hand, and seemed to take no further interest in the case.

Ross rose to close, pale but determined. His case rested almost entirely on Larry's own story, which was unsupported by any direct evidence, and his point was to let the jury see how impossible it would be for a man like Larry to commit deliberate murder.

He began by going back to his friend's childhood, his careful, prayerful bringing up in the New England home. He described him as a youth, and a young man as he had known him at college; he told of the long years they had lived together, of the deep friendship which had

always existed between them; he painted him as he had first seen him—a curly-haired, light-hearted boy of seventeen; he dwelt on his early manhood, his standing, his honors, the love which was felt for him by his patients and his townsmen; he spoke with a tremor in his voice of his wife and the lovely home; and then he asked them if a man reared in this way, with these surroundings, these loves, these ambitions, these successes, coming from the fresh, sweet blood-cleansing air of the country could deliberately do this vile and awful deed. Ross spoke with the fervor of conviction, with the voice of love and friendship, with the memory of many a happy day and many a brotherly kindness sweeping through his mind. He pleaded as for a son, and the tears dropped from Larry's eyes upon the rail, where so many felons' hands had rested.

The State's Attorney made his closing argument. He was an elderly man who had grown gray in criminal trials, and had all the tricks of the orator at his command, and when he had finished it was perfectly clear that Larry was about the deepest-dyed villain that ever stood in the dock, and people eyed him with horror and loathing. The prisoner watched the face of the lawyer as he spoke, with a kind of fascination. He did not seem to realize that all this eloquence was aimed at him; his mind was dazed, deadened to his danger and situation; and he found him-

self nodding approval at the well-rounded periods, the quick-falling shower of crisp, cutting phrases.

Ross had at last stirred the sympathies of the jurors, if he had not changed their opinions. The judge gave his charge to the jury, and they retired. After they had left a gloomy silence fell upon the court-room. The judge scanned some papers; the lawyers conversed in a low and subdued tone, and the audience confined itself to awesome whispers. The minutes seemed hours, and all eyes watched the hands of the tall clock as they dragged their weary way around the stolid dial. Larry still sat with his head bowed on his hands, and Ross watched him with a loving, pitying look in his eyes.

At last the jury came filing back and took their seats.

"Have you agreed upon a verdict?" asked the judge, of the foreman.

"We have."

"You may read it."

The foreman stood in his place, and while the jury bowed their eyes, as though fearful of their own work, and the audience listened in breathless silence, he read, in slow and distinct tones:

"We find the prisoner guilty of murder in the first degree, but on account of his youth, his previous good character, and other extenuating circumstances, we recommend him for mercy."

Larry did not raise his head as the words were spoken, but a shiver ran through his body, and the sheriff, who sat beside him, heard him murmur:

"Poor little woman!"

A thrill of horror ran through the crowd, and Ross's head sunk on his breast. He had made the best fight he could and had lost. There was no escape. There was nothing on which he could rely for a new trial. The evidence was clear and convincing, and while he knew Larry's story to be true, there was no way of proving it.

"Let the prisoner stand and receive his sentence," said the judge, after a few moments' thought.

Larry stood up, his head thrown back, his clear eye fixed upon the judge—a magnificent specimen of manhood—ready to meet his fate, whatever it was, and knowing himself innocent of any intentional crime.

"Larry Reynolds, you are found guilty of murder in the first degree, and the penalty of the law is death; but on account of certain mitigating circumstances and the recommendation of the jury, I sentence you to twenty-five years in State's—"

Just here a commotion near the door drowned the judge's voice, and he looked up in an irritated manner to see what the cause of it was. A man had just entered, and was pushing his way hastily through the crowd toward

the bar of the court. Seeing the judge about to go on, the man raised his hand, and said:

"Your honor, I have some important testimony to offer in this case. Is it too late to introduce it? It will completely change the whole aspect of the matter."

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am Inspector Brown, of the Metropolitan Detective Force, your honor."

"Yes, yes, I recognize you now. Well, Mr. Brown, your evidence must be very important for you to interrupt at this stage of the trial."

"It is so important that if the case is not reopened now I am satisfied that your honor would grant the prisoner a new trial when you have heard it."

"Well, this is rather an unusual procedure, but I will remand the case to the jury and you may make your statement, as I know you to be a man not likely to go this far without good reasons."

"Your honor, and gentlemen of the jury, the story is briefly this. At the request of Mr. Valentine, the counsel for the defense, I was put on this case with instructions to follow it up sharp.

"My first step was to discover the identity of the murdered woman. This was not a very difficult matter. She proved to be a Mrs. Caxton, the wife of a gambler of that name. She was formerly a Miss Romero and is of Italian

descent. It seemed strange to me this husband had not come forward to claim the body, or appeared in the case at all, and I determined to find him. For a longtime I was unsuccessful and thought he had left the city, but at last, by frequenting the gambling-houses, I found my man, of whom I had a very good description.

"The first time I laid my eyes on him I was struck with one thing, and that was his remarkable resemblance to the prisoner. It was astonishing. You could hardly tell them apart; same size, figure and build; same hair, eyes and features; same carriage and deportment. This similarity set me to thinking.

"I made his acquaintance, disguised, of course, and induced him to play cards.

"I allowed him to win a little money, and got him to drinking. This loosened his tongue, and he let out several important bits of information; among others the fact that he was at the Arion Ball on the night of the murder, and that he wore the uniform of an officer of hussars.

"By a little skillful manipulating I got him to tell me that he met a charming woman there, and went with her to a noted restaurant for supper; but I could get nothing further from him. Something seemed to close his lips, and no arts of mine could get him to tell what he did after that. At all events, I thought, I must find who the woman was with whom he dined. Another bottle of wine did

the business, and leaving him under the eye of one of my assistants, I left to interview the woman.

"I found her living in handsome apartments in a flat on K. Street. She was rather attractive and elegantly dressed, with a profusion of jewels. I had learned before calling on her that her reputation was a trifle shady, and that she had no husband nor visible means of support.

"I knew by the expression of her face when I announced that I had come to make some inquiries as to her companion of the night of the Arion Ball that she was alarmed, and felt that, by working her right, I could get some valuable information. I am a pretty fair judge of faces, and I knew by hers that she would scare easily, so I 'jumped on her,' all at once, as it were, and asked her point-blank to tell me all she knew about the murder.

"She turned as white as a sheet, and began to deny any knowledge of it, but I knew I was on the right scent then, and gave her to understand that it would be better for her to make a clean breast of it. In fact, I told her if she would tell me the whole truth I would assist in shielding her from arrest as an accomplice. After some hesitation, she told me she was at the ball by appointment with Caxton, whom she had known for some months, and who had been in the habit of calling upon her. In some way, Mrs. Caxton, who, as I have said, was of Italian descent, discovered the *liaison* and, naturally, became furiously jeal-

ous. She had a suspicion that Caxton was going to this ball, probably to meet this woman, and, unknown to her husband, followed him there.

"After leaving the ball-room they drove to a restaurant and had supper and several bottles of wine, and Caxton became partially intoxicated. Between one and two they left the restaurant, and, no cab being in sight, started on foot for her apartments. As they were going through Twenty-third Street, they saw a woman approaching them at a rapid pace and moaning as though in pain. As they were passing her she looked up, and, as bad luck would have it, husband and wife were face to face. The woman gave one look at her husband, and then, drawing a knife from her bosom, sprang at his companion with the cry of a wounded tigress. Caxton, who by this time was very drunk, tried to separate them, and not succeeding, became furious, grasped his wife by the throat, and, after holding her for some moments until she sank back limp in his arms, threw her from him to the pavement, where she struck with a sickening thud.

"Caxton's companion had escaped serious injury, only being scratched by the knife, and she hurried him away from the scene, fearing the arrival of the police. Neither of them knew nor cared much, apparently, whether the poor woman whom they had left on the cold pavement was dead or alive. He was too drunk to think, and she too callous.

"The next day, when they heard of the death of Mrs. Caxton, they felt and knew they were responsible therefor, and had every reason for keeping quiet. Caxton was for fleeing the country at once, but his companion advised against it, as it would attract attention and fasten the crime upon them."

"Your honor," interrupted the State's Attorney, rising, "all this story may be true, but there is one important point which it does not explain. You will remember that the body was minus a hand and that said hand was found in the prisoner's trunk."

"I think I can explain that satisfactorily," said the detective. "It is my opinion that the prisoner at the bar has told the exact truth and I shall try to prove it. I have already spoken of the remarkable resemblance between the prisoner and this man Caxton. When I produce him in court, it will be evident to you. By some singular coincidence they hired their costumes for the masquerade of the same costumer, and by a sort of fatality selected the same costume, identical in every particular. I found this out by a visit to the costumer. He had a number of similar uniforms which had been used for some theatrical performance. So you will see that, when they appeared at the ball, masked, their best friend might have been deceived as to their identity."

As the detective made this statement there was a stir

at the rear of the court-room, and a small woman, closely veiled, pressed up near the speaker.

"My idea," went on the detective, "is, that the murdered woman on arriving at the ball at once sought for her husband, and recognized him, as she supposed, in the masked hussar, but that she hit upon the *wrong* hussar, mistaking the prisoner for her husband.

"When the prisoner left the ball she followed him, and seeing him enter the Hoffman House and knowing his inconstancy, believed she had trapped him. We know that a woman entered the house just as he did, for the door-keeper has so testified.

"Well, she precedes him up the stairs, goes into the parlor and waits for him to go by, and then follows him until she ascertains the number of his room. She then secretes herself about the house somewhere, or takes a room till all is quiet, and then steals back to the room which she has noted, procures a chair and pulls herself up till she can look over the transom. In doing this she awakens Mr. Reynolds, who, half asleep and thinking he is about to be attacked by a burglar, springs from his bed, grasps the nearest weapon, which happens to be the sword belonging to his masquerade costume, and strikes at the hand over the transom to prevent further ingress, or intercept the escape of the supposed burglar, if he had already been in.

"Before he can open the door, the woman, who must have been a very plucky little thing, in spite of her lost hand and bleeding wrist, hurries down the corridor and out at the ladies' entrance.

"She realizes that she has been severely wounded and ties her handkerchief around her arm above the wrist, twisting it tight with the steel pin which she wore in her hair so as to form a tourniquet. This stopped the flow of blood, and she turned towards her home, but had not gone far when she met her real husband with this woman, and the result has already been described to you. She was killed by her own husband, and not by the loss of her hand. The post-mortem examination showed that the woman had not probably lost enough blood to have caused her death."

The sensation created in the court by these revelations was wonderful. Every head was craned forward to catch the words of the speaker, and even the judge appeared pleased and relieved. Ross was perfectly jubilant, and looked at Larry with a radiant face. But the man who was most interested seemed the least affected. During the relation of the detective he had recovered his *sang froid*, and was now gazing serenely around the court-room as though he had been a mere spectator.

"Your honor," said the State's Attorney, "this man's story is very plausible, and his theories well worked out,

but what we want here is evidence and not any man's opinions. I suppose he can produce witnesses to prove his statements."

"I can, your honor," and he made a sign to an officer, who stepped to the door and reappeared with a tall, fair-haired man.

As he advanced into the room every one stared in astonishment, and turned from the new arrival to glance at the prisoner at the bar. Here was a piece of speaking evidence, though silent. If the man advancing and the prisoner at the bar had been dressed alike and shaken up in a hat, their best friends could not have told them apart. Even Larry himself was surprised into an exclamation, and the veiled woman who had before displayed such an interest in the proceedings laughed aloud. It seemed to amuse her. Why?

"Your honor, may I place this witness by the side of the prisoner?"

"You may."

The man was placed by Larry's side, evidently for the effect of the thing, and then only was there a difference visible, and that was in their manner. Larry's head was erect and proud, while honesty and innocence shone from his eyes, but his companion's head was lowered, his eye drooped, and when you could get a glimpse of it it was shifty and uneasy.

As soon as the man Caxton had been placed by Larry's side, the officer went out again, and returned with a woman. The whole thing was so dramatic, so theatrical, that the audience were at a perfect fever pitch, and the jury were all leaning forward in their chairs to see what was coming next.

The moment Caxton's eyes fell on this woman, he shrunk back, and a cold shiver ran through his frame. He recognized her and saw that his guilt was known.

It is needless to describe the rest. The woman, who was Caxton's companion of the night of the ball, turned State's evidence, and her story, with the chain of proof put together link by link by the detective, was convincing and overwhelming, and when, after a brief *résumé* of the case by Ross, it was again given to the jury they came back in less than five minutes with a verdict exonerating Larry and implicating the Caxton man, who was taken to the Tombs to await his trial.

The trial was at an end. The court adjourned; the people filed slowly out, glancing sympathetically at the man who had come so near suffering for a crime committed by another; and Larry, now a free man, stepped out of the dock and grasped Ross's hand which he wrung for some moments without saying a word.

"I owe it all to you, Ross," he said at last.

"To me! What did I do? You owe it all to Brown the detective."

"But he was working for you and at your instigation, and if you had not had sense enough to hire this particular man the mystery never would have been unraveled. His work was wonderful. But how did it happen you knew nothing about it?"

"Well, you see, he did not hit upon the trail till last night, and he has been following it up sharp ever since, and had no time nor opportunity to see me. So he just got his evidence and witnesses together, and hurried up to the court-room, in hopes of getting here before the evidence was all in; but he didn't, and so adopted the course which you witnessed. It was unique but successful."

"Now, Ross, if I only knew where my wife was I should be the happiest of men. Where can she be? If she could only know me innocent!"

Hardly had these words left his lips when he saw two gloved hands stealing around his neck from behind, and a voice whispered in his ear:

"I do know, Larry! Can you forgive me for doubting you?"

Without a word Larry caught his wife in his arms, and in spite of the presence of the few remaining people, bowed his head on her shoulder and wept.

Ross, hardly able to restrain his own emotion at the

happy outcome of what had looked a very serious and tragical matter, stepped aside, ostensibly to pick up his books and papers.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT night Ross dined with Larry and his wife at their hotel, and after Larry had made a clean breast of all his movements since he left home, he said to the little woman opposite:

"Now, Patience, I have told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and I think you owe me an explanation. Where have you been? Why did you leave home, and what have you been doing?"

"Larry, I am almost ashamed to tell you. I really believe I have done more wrong than you have." And she looked from Larry to Ross appealingly, as though fearing her story would be frowned upon.

"Well, I'm glad if there's something for me to forgive, little woman," said Larry. "It will 'let me down' a trifle easier, you see. So, let's have it!"

"You see," began Patience, "I was awfully jealous of you, though I didn't say much about it, and when you proposed to go to New York and didn't ask me to go too, I was sure there was a woman in the case and that you were deceiving, and as the doubt was torturing me I resolved to follow you and find out."

"Oh ho! that's where the trouble was!" exclaimed Larry.

"Yes, and I left home on the next train, and went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel where I have been ever since, under an assumed name. I don't know what made me think you would go to the Arion Ball, but I happened to see the advertisement in the paper, and the feeling came over me at once that you would be there, and I waited outside your hotel door in a carriage that night, and when I saw you come out I had my driver follow you. I procured a domino and mask at the ball, and went on the floor, and it wasn't long before I picked you out, or I thought I had."

"I see it all!" cried Ross. "You picked out the other hussar."

"Yes, so it seems. And I followed him all the rest of the evening, and when he left the hall with that woman I was at their heels. When they went into the restaurant together I cared to see no more, and hurried back to my room more dead than alive, and I can tell you, Larry, that you came very near being a widower that night."

The tears sprang to her eyes, and Larry squeezed her hand under the table-cloth.

"The next day I picked up the paper, and the first thing I saw was the account of the murder, and your connection with it, and you can readily see that I believed it

was true. I thought you would be tried, convicted and hung, so I resolved to await the trial, and if you were found guilty I intended to come forward and forgive and comfort you as well as I could under the circumstances."

Before either Larry or his wife could say anything more Ross raised his glass, and said:

"Life is like this glass of champagne, especially married life. The bubbles which float upon the top and which momentarily rise from the depths are the daily trials and troubles and doubts, but see how quickly they disappear. The soft amber liquid with its red, lambent lights is the real and beautiful part of life, holding its joys, its pleasures, its hopes, its ambitions, its loves. See how invitingly it dances and sparkles, how it jumps up the crystal sides of the glass as though it would make its way down your throat in spite of you. How kind and grateful to those who know its moods and handle it with care. My dear children, life is not all a dream, but to such as you it can be made to effervesce with daily joys."

As he finished his eyes fell upon the woman opposite, and she knew his secret.

THE END.

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